

PUBLISHED VERSION

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Research in African Literatures, 2007; 38(2):22-35

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“This [selection] was published as **Samuelson, Meg. “Yvonne Vera's Bulawayo: Modernity, (Im)Mobility, Music, and Memory.”** *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2007, pp. 22–35. No part of it may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, or distributed in any form, by any means, electronic, mechanical, photographic, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Indiana University Press. For education reuse, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center <<http://www.copyright.com/>>. For all other permissions, contact IU Press at <<http://iupress.indiana.edu/rights/>>.”

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22 August 2018

<http://hdl.handle.net/2440/113630>

Yvonne Vera's Bulawayo: Modernity, (Im)mobility, Music, and Memory¹

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the production and performance of urban modern subjectivity in Vera's *Bulawayo*, as represented in her two final novels, *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*. The modern subject emerges from these fictions as an inherently restless one: railing against colonial containment and articulating its desire for an elsewhere, it finds expression in Vera's privileged tropes of music and trains; both traveling tropes, music and trains in these texts are rendered as figures through which movement across rural/urban and national boundaries is articulated. Honing in on these tropes, as well as those of the photograph and the street corner, Vera cracks upon the ambivalences infusing urban modernity in both colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe. Grappling with, and seeking not to subdue, the dissonance introduced by such ambivalence, the novels expose the fraudulent promises of colonial and national modernities, highlighting, in particular, their gendered logics. Vera's final novel, I argue, writes towards a utopian modernity yet to be realized. If modernity has been conceptualized and lived as a flight from the past, that towards which Vera writes draws upon memory to counter the homogenizing drive of the modern colonial or nation state.

In her two final novels, *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*, Yvonne Vera inscribes Bulawayo across a period of forty years—from colonial town, through independence and the Matabeleland massacres, to postcolonial city—before coming to rest on the tender reconstruction of the precolonial town of kwoBulawayo in what are now the last lines of published prose that will issue from her pen. This article explores the production and performance of modern subjectivity in Vera's *Bulawayo* and charts its restlessness by engaging with Vera's privileged tropes of music and trains; both traveling tropes, music and trains, in these texts are rendered as figures through which movement across rural/urban and national boundaries is articulated. Honing in on these tropes, as well as those of

the photograph and the street corner, Vera cracks upon the ambivalences infusing urban modernity in both colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe. Grappling with, and seeking not to subdue, the dissonance introduced by such ambivalence, the novels expose the fraudulent promises of colonial and national modernities, while writing towards a utopian modernity yet to be realized. If modernity has been conceptualized and lived as a flight from the past, that towards which Vera writes draws upon memory to counter the homogenizing drive of the modern colonial or nation state.

Conceptions of space and of bodies in space have long preoccupied Vera and constitute a central focus of her doctoral study, which employs Edward Said's description of "imperialism as an act of 'geographical violence'" and Michel Foucault's understanding of subjectification, here "modified]" to render visible spaces of resistance that elude the surveillance of modern colonial power ("Prison" 2, 13). Appropriately, then, *The Stone Virgins* opens with an extended mapping of the colonial city that points to the geographical violence performed by the town planners. Cutting their grid-like street structure into the landscape and, through naming, creating place as a chronicle of colonial rule, they produce "space as alienation" ("Prison" 9).

The earlier *Butterfly Burning* has shown that this city—with its seemingly open vistas that the gaze can peruse unobstructed for "miles and miles" (*Stone* 11)—is filled with "NO BLACKS signs, WHITES ONLY signs" (*Butterfly* 6), delimiting the movement of black Rhodesians. Presenting "a single solid view, undisturbed" (*Stone* 12), the city operates as a disciplinary technology of surveillance whose spatial geography contrasts with rural Kezi's "narrow meandering footpaths leading in and out of every homestead" (*Stone* 24). Far from being sketched wholly negatively, however, the city is celebrated for the "anonymity" it grants those who perambulate its streets, savoring the pleasures of "being regarded as strangers in their own town" (*Stone* 13). Thus do the novels sound their note of ambivalence, which permeates into each nook and cranny of the colonial city.

The city itself appears to marshal the desires that it in turn polices. For instance, the geographical violence and restrictions of movement to which the subjects of Vera's fiction are subject produce in them a fervent desire for mobility: "The people walk in the city without encroaching on the pavements from which they are banned. [. . .] They understand something about limits and the desire that this builds in the body" (*Butterfly* 3–4; emphasis added). The restless urban subjectivity infusing Vera's Bulawayo is, then, produced from a subjectifying containment.

Banned from the pavements, Vera's black subjects inhabit the city by "liv[ing] within the cracks" (*Butterfly* 3). While shaped into postures of obedience, moreover, they find spaces for defiance: "Then they spit on the pavements and move on" (4). Thus, in terms of subjective agency, the cracks coursing across Vera's cityscape are ambivalent spaces simultaneously visible and invisible, simultaneously suggesting the pleasures of lingering and the necessity of movement. One such space is the corner, "*ekoneni*":

Ekoneni is a rendezvous, a place to meet. You cannot meet inside any of the buildings because this city is divided, entry is forbidden to black men and women [. . .] Here you linger, ambivalent, permanent as time. You are in transit. The corner is a camouflage, a place of instancy and style; a place of protest. (*Stone* 18)

Again we find that the new spatial geography of the modern city actively works on the bodies and desires of its subjects: "You approach a corner, you make a turn. This movement defines the body, shapes it in a sudden and miraculous way" (*Stone* 17).

In *The Stone Virgins*, "ekoneni" provides a rendezvous for two lovers, who agree to visit a photographic studio together. Elsewhere, Vera notes the camera's ability to provide "a powerful tool for exploring new identities," even though it arrived in Africa "as part of colonial paraphernalia, together with the gun and the bible" (*Thatha* 1). Like "ekoneni," then, the photograph is an ambivalent space of modern self-fashioning.² Most appealing to Vera's lovers are two options: one is a studio in which to fashion a modern, city self; the other superimposes the self upon "a backdrop of sailing ships," which "shows that you are not as landlocked in this city as everywhere else in the country" (*Stone* 20–21).

The first exemplifies Abdou Maliq Simone's claim that colonialism

shape[d] urbanization so that cities would act instrumentally on African bodies and social formations in ways that made various endogenous forms of and proclivities toward urbanization possible only within the context of an enforced engagement with the European world. (*For the City* 139)

Thus we see the woman rejecting "African Photo Studio on Lobengula Street" in favor of

Kay's Photo Studio on Jameson Street where they give you a small mirror for one hand, and a wine glass for the other while the camera clicks and flashes and another self flickers right past you while you stand still, and time stands still, and the self that you have prepared all week and now set free falls into the palm of your hand. (*Stone* 20)

It is this studio that makes its subjects feel that "the city is part of you" (*Stone* 20); revealingly, this city self is one split into a stance of "double consciousness." Divided first between mirror and body, and then again between body and the image that floats free into the palm of one's hand, the self-image developed suggests the ambiguous placing of the embodied black female subject as both inside and outside the modernity that the city represents: as both desiring modern urban autonomy and self-determination—the freedom to fashion the self—and being excluded from such freedoms by the modern practices of colonial power and its racist regimes.

Similarly, through another trick with mirrors, at Star Photo Studio "two selves emerge from every picture" (*Stone* 20). With its backdrop of sailing ships, the self-image developed here suggests alternative engagements: not so much with European modernity as with black countercultures. The image of the ship in motion is, after all, the chronotope employed by Paul Gilroy to conceptualize the circulation of cultural forms that constitute the Black Atlantic. (It is notable that this studio—now translated and renewed as "Stella Nova Photo Studio" (160)—is the one Nonceba passes when walking through the postindependence city.)

The desire for an elsewhere—and for channels of passage to this elsewhere—encapsulated in the self produced in Star Photo Studio pervades Vera's Bulawayo, and is centered on the dominant tropes of music and trains. Both function as

touchstones against which can be measured the emergence of a city self established in defiance of colonial attempts to keep the city white and Africans rural; both are at the same time emblems of connectivity to and from other cities. The attainment of a city self, then, locates the subjects of Vera's fiction not so much in this particular city, Bulawayo, but in a network of cities. Thus, while simultaneously permitting and policing movement, Bulawayo's street layout opens outward, concretizing other established patterns of mobility:

Selborne carries you straight out of the city limits and heads all the way to Johannesburg like an umbilical cord, therefore, part of that city is here, its joy and notorious radiance is measured in the sleek gestures of city labourers, black, who voyage back and forth between Bulawayo and Johannesburg. (*Stone* 12)

Bulawayo thus becomes the nexus at which the rural world of Kezi meets the burgeoning urban sprawl of Johannesburg, the "city of gold" (see *Stone* 22); each of these two arteries flowing through it rearticulates and re-imagines the other, deconstructing the binaries that underpin much modern thought: rural versus urban, national versus transnational, and tradition versus modernity.

Vera's Bulawayo is distinguished by being the headquarters of the Rhodesian Railways. It is this that defines her city, lending a particular inflection to the desires produced and nurtured therein.³ "The city is like the train," asserts the narrator of *Butterfly Burning*: "It too is churning smoke in every direction, and when looked at closely, it too is moving" (45). As Simone suggests, our ability to trace the "networks, pathways and routes" that flow within and between city space depends on "recovering the original functions of the majority of African cities—as points and organizers of entry and exit, railheads and crossroads" ("Globalization" D8; see also Mbembe and Nuttall 351). Focusing on the trains moving in and out of Bulawayo, Vera presents the city as a hub in a larger continental and transcontinental network, rather than as a city entirely unto itself or fully contained within the boundaries of the colonial (or nation) state. The train is an emblem of connectivity to and from different worlds. For those who have been ferried across the Limpopo on its tracks, the memory—"glittering in their minds" (*Butterfly* 67)—is savored, mulled over in shebeens, mixed in the mouth with skokiaan, producing new melodies of modernity: "Nothing has more music in it than trains" (*Butterfly* 43).

Inscribing their presence in the city—this city and that city—through musical forms, Vera's migrants partake of what Simone, writing of the migratory act in Africa, describes as "improvisation," a process in which movement between spaces becomes "a means of effacing specific constraints posed by both environments," rather than an act of locating or relocating belonging in either (*For* 119–20).⁴ Thus do the novel's tropes of trains and music mesh in the creation and conceptualization of a restless urban subject.

Butterfly Burning taps to the tune of kwela music,⁵ which, like the city itself, is a space of ambivalence, as is the photograph, "ekoneni," and the trains that imply an "ease of movement" and yet enclose their black passengers in "Fourth Class coaches" (43).⁶ "Within this music they soar higher than clouds; sink deeper than stones in water. [. . .] This is Kwela. Embracing choices that are already decided. [. . .] Kwela means to climb into the waiting police jeeps" (3). Kwela takes its name

from the injunction to “climb up” into the police van, an injunction often consequent on infringements of pass laws and influx control regulations—in short, of restrictions of mobility; it suggests again the desire for mobility born of, and partially contained within, prohibition and geographical violence. Michael Titlestad, whose comments on the functioning of jazz in apartheid South Africa are equally applicable to white-ruled Rhodesia, usefully untangles this ambiguity as follows: “The sign faces both ways—control and transgression—and announces the inseparability of (acoustic) defiance and policing in South Africa” (49). Fashioned out of the debris of modern, urban life (children playing in the streets of Makokoba produce its melodies out of abandoned bottles and cartons), kwela speaks of the acquisitive force of African urban modernities,⁷ of their ability to pull a word “back from the police jeep” (*Butterfly* 3) and reconfigure it as the “pulse” of “full desire” (5, 3).⁸

Through music, the township, Makokoba, infiltrates into the city proper, with its signs that say “WHITES ONLY [. . .] NO BLACKS,” and beyond it to other cities, particularly the alluring “city of gold” in the south.⁹ Thus, the infusion of kwela rhythms into this Zimbabwean text points to regional circuits through which southern African city space is experienced and managed. Returning to Bulawayo, Vera’s migrant workers carry Johannesburg with them, within the movements of their bodies, as they stamp out its beat: “they know some gumbboot dance, some knuckle-ready sound, some click song” (*Butterfly* 13). Equally, music points to the circuits of exchange between Bulawayo and the spaces of the Black Atlantic as Vera configures a new triangle, with African city spaces at the two base axes:

In a secluded bar black men recite all they can remember about that time when Satchmo was suddenly in their midst, taking their song, *Skokiaan*, from their mouths and letting it course through his veins like blood, their blood. The wonder of it. The enduring wonder of it. (*Stone* 14)

“Jazz,” observes Titlestad, “though an icon of urbanism, implicates global flows of meaning conceived as alternative cartographies of an entire hemisphere. It is described in narratives that link far-flung communities through a strategic historiography” (13).

Recording the influence of black Southern African music on African-American artists such as Louis Armstrong,¹⁰ Vera makes two significant moves that answer to the critique Ntongela Masilela has leveled against Gilroy’s study, which, claims Masilela, “excludes Africa” (88; see also Zeleza 37). Firstly, she re-inserts southern Africa into the Black Atlantic cultural circuit; secondly, while detailing “trans-Atlantic identifications and aspirations” (Masilela 93), she points to African influence on African-American modernity (rather than vice versa).¹¹ On each rim of the circum-Atlantic world, jazz operates as a medium through which to mediate and manage a cruel colonial modernity; it does so partially by imagining alternative cultural roots and routes that both embed subjects in *and* cut across the contours of European modernity.

Inserting black countercultures into colonial modernity, Vera also traces the ways in which experiences of mobility and modernity (even countermodernities) are gendered. In doing so, she cracks open the ambivalences of colonial modernity. As recorded in her fiction, colonial legislation anxiously policed African

presence in and movement through city space. The artificial society assembled under these systems depended on an African urban labor force, as we see in the case of Fumbatha; yet, in order to mark cities as European, it presented Africans as rural subjects, always in transit in urban space.¹² The cramped conditions of Vera's Makokoba dwellings testify to the colonial construction of urban Africans as a transient presence: "They had been built mostly for bachelors, the women were not expected to follow their men to the city" (*Butterfly* 87). Much of Vera's attention in *Butterfly Burning* falls on the fate of women in townships designed by white men for black men as transitory subjects. At the same time, she also attends to African men's attempts to restrict the movement of women, showing us Fumbatha's anxious possessiveness, his sense of self "threatened" by Phephelaphi's carefree perambulations down a street (29).

Lured by music to a local shebeen, Phephelaphi is rendered a desiring subject: "When the music tears into the room she almost falls to the floor with agony. [. . .] It leaves a tunnel, an empty tunnel she fills with a far-flung desire. A yearning" (56). But she finds herself excluded from the world of male mobility that lends kwela its rhythm: she wonders how she can, "like these men, cross the Limpopo to recover a glittering memory. How did a woman claim a piece of time and make it glitter? [. . .] How did she listen to the sound of trains when she was not burrowing in the earth for true gold?" (70). Phephelaphi's desire to embrace the city's promises of modernity, and hence of mobility, sparks her aspirations for a nursing career: "It is not being a nurse which matters, but the movement forward—the entrance into something new and untried" (60), we are told. In search of a new modern self—"something with an outline"—Phephelaphi longs for "a birth of her own" rather than the birth of another (68). The city both produces and constrains—or produces from constraint—the individual selfhood after which Phephelaphi hankers,¹³ and which is frustrated, in turn, by both the contradictions of colonial modernity and the reproductive demands of African patriarchy. For Phephelaphi, as for Mazvita in Vera's earlier *Without a Name*, the city's promises of modernity, of freedom from the burdens of the past, prove tragically illusive.

Watching her dreams evaporate before her eyes, Phephelaphi fights against this unbearable "vanishing with a multitude of objects," desperately trying to secure "something solid" while "question[ing] each event because it had passed" (*Butterfly* 93). She here articulates the ambivalence of the modern subject explicated by Marshall Berman: "They are moved at once by a will to change—to transform both themselves and their world—and by a terror of disorientation and the dread of a world in which 'all that is solid melts into air'" (13). This predicament is heightened in the midst of a fraudulent colonial modernity exemplified by the segregated city that infamously banned Africans from its pavements: the "only concreteness is the pavement, and that they cannot even walk on" (45). If Phephelaphi is a true modern subject in her *yearning* for change, her resolute turning from nostalgic pasts and her active desire for mobility (see Berman 95–96), as a black woman in Rhodesia she is only able to experience such lightness of being when she flies in the flames of her self-immolating extinction.

The final sections of *The Stone Virgins*, set in postindependence and post-civil-conflict Bulawayo, are markedly more optimistic about the extent to which the urban promise of modernity can be embraced. Thus we find in the concluding pages of Vera's last novel an image of a woman walking freely through the

postcolonial city. Here we are offered a contrasting view of the city to that of the novel's opening paragraphs. Nonceba's postindependence Bulawayo is experienced intimately rather than panoptically; following her through the streets, we are immersed in the de Certeauian act of "walking in the city," in which both the city and the subject moving through it are constantly and creatively remade. Responding to Foucault's deterministic power structures, de Certeau posits the possibility of subversion from within subjectification.¹⁴ Vera, it seems, concurs with his analysis: the Bulawayo we encounter at the end of *The Stone Virgins* is no longer perused by the "solar Eye, looking down like a god" (de Certeau 92); rather than reading the city from a position of omniscience, the narrator descends into the streets with Nonceba, writing in her footsteps a new "urban 'text'" (de Certeau 93) that will begin to retrieve and re-evaluate Phephelaphi's longings.

Nonceba's act of walking the city suggests that urban space and subjectivity need not only to be remade by crossing space demarcated by "WHITES ONLY . . . NO BLACKS" signs, but also that place needs to be made for women in the city. This is not to say that women are newcomers to city space; rather, it is to note, as Diana Jeater has argued, that even as women filled city space, the city continued to be imagined as having and being "no place for a woman." Unspoken in the text, and yet resonant with much of its content, is the post-independence backlash against independent or mobile city women: the so-called "Operation Clean-up" in which single women in the city were named prostitutes and rounded up for disciplinary action in newly independent Zimbabwe (see Watson 7–19). Nonceba's wanderings—in defiance of such gendered constructions of city space and the bodies that move across it—conclude at a street corner, from which she enters her apartment. No longer is "ekoneni" an illicit space in which to linger invisibly before moving out of the city-proper; it is now the entrance into her home, which, far from being the place into which women are writ out of city space, is located in the heart of the city.

Nonceba, a survivor of the postindependence civil conflict, and Cephas, the lover of her now-murdered sister who has rescued Nonceba from the landscape of trauma, live separately yet together with their two bedrooms interfacing. Cephas, as emblem of the new man, and in marked contrast to Fumbatha, abets Nonceba's need to "find places for herself to inhabit, without him" (*Stone* 165). The novel concludes with him withdrawing from Nonceba, allowing her to find her own paths through the city, her own spaces in their home. Music once again guides the narrative, sounding out the terms of their relationship: "Nonceba has grown on him [. . .] like a good song. He wants to help, to sustain, not to contain" (169).

Cephas is equally concerned with the task of sustaining—but not containing—memory, to which Vera gives her last words:

A new nation needs to restore the past. His focus, the beehive hut to be installed at Lobengula's ancient kraal in kwoBulawayo the following year. His task is to learn to recreate the manner in which the tenderest branches bend, meet and dry, the way grass folds smoothly over this frame and weaves a nest, the way it protects the cool livable places within; deliverance. (174)

KwoBulawayo, which Cephas aims to reconstruct, is the precolonial seat of the Ndebele kingdom, established in the wake of the mfecane, during which Mzilikazi

split from Shaka's empire. In 1893, it was razed to the ground and replaced by the colonial town, built almost literally on its ashes in a triumphant white gesture of land appropriation (see Kaarsholm 230). Thus are we brought full circle to the anterior event that shapes Fumbatha's consciousness in the preceding novel: the hanging of his father during the Matabele resistance against encroaching colonizers in 1896. Nearly a century later, Bulawayo's rural surrounds witnessed the state-engineered massacres, directed largely at a civilian Ndebele-speaking population, which constitute the thematic core of *The Stone Virgins* (see Driver and Samuelson).

Thus, Cephas's reconstructive gesture responds both to the colonial alienation of space *and* to the violent casting out of Ndebele-speakers from the new nation during the early post-independence period. At the same time, this closing reference to kwoBulawayo and Lobengula, son of Mzilikazi, reminds us that both mobility and urban settlement have a long genealogy in Africa, exceeding colonial rule.¹⁵ Restoring kwoBulawayo in the wake of the massacres, Cephas redirects its legacy of "state-formation" into the postcolonial present while, with his emphasis on tenderness and fragility, rejecting the legacy of "devastating warfare" encoded in its name (Omer-Cooper 278), literally "place of slaughter."

John Omer-Cooper singles out nineteenth-century Matabele state-building efforts for their "rapid assimilation of political, linguistic and cultural aliens and the development of a sense of common identity and loyalty within the new rapidly aggregated composite communities" (278). Thus are we returned to the promise of modernity spoken in *Butterfly Burning*, and then betrayed by modernity's vicious visage in the Matabeleland massacres:

The people have come from everywhere, and absorb and learn not only each other's secrets but each other's enigmatic languages. Accent rubs against accent, word upon word, dialect upon dialect, till the restless sound clears like smoke, the collision of words, tones, rhythms and meanings more present than the trains beating past. They laugh when meaning collapses under the weight of words, when word shuffles against word, but they know something precious has been discovered when a new sound is freed and soothes the gaps between them. (*Butterfly* 44)

The Stone Virgins returns to the necessarily incomplete project of modernity that is left dangling—like a thread from the mouth, to adapt one of the novel's images—in *Butterfly Burning*. While attendant to continuities between the excesses of colonial and nationalist modernities—most notably in its representation of the Matabeleland massacres—*The Stone Virgins* locates in the postcolonial present the possibility of bringing to fruition the desires engendered in the earlier novel. Thus, I suggest that in the latter novel Vera returns to Phephelaphi's yearnings and allows Nonceba to realize them, albeit tentatively. Whereas Phephelaphi's dreams of economic independence, in service to the birth of a new individual self, literally go up in flames, Nonceba finds a job for herself "on the street" (*Stone* 165) and Cephas, who himself wished to present her with a job, cedes to her desires, in contrast to Fumbatha.

Cephas can productively be read as a synthesis of the possibilities encoded in Phephelaphi and Fumbatha. Such a reading is supported by the most fragile

scaffolding, yet given Vera's prioritizing of the fragile and the provisional in her final published words, I will risk constructing a small edifice upon it: when Phephelaphi's application to train as a nurse, and thus fulfill her modern yearnings, is accepted, we learn that her full name is Miss Phephelaphi Dube; we may then read Cephas Dube as the future she might have generated had she not found herself impaled upon the contradictions of colonial modernity. Thus we can read Cephas's restorative gesture as a rewriting of Phephelaphi's abortive attempts to restore to herself the promise of modernity by "weav[ing] a nest, a coarse cradle of thorn" for the fetus she cannot, in 1948, carry to term without compromising her modern aspirations (*Butterfly* 103). Cephas's ability to do so depends on taking from Fumbatha his attachment to the past, and from Phephelaphi her fervent desire for a future; it requires that he share with Fumbatha a life-changing love for a woman, but depart from Fumbatha's need to control her movements.

In the final paragraph of her oeuvre, Vera returns to an injunction issued in *Butterfly Burning*, in which the desire spawned by and spoken in kwela is described as "Something that can be recovered, must be restored. Even if it may now be frayed or torn" (5). Frayed and torn in the final section of *The Stone Virgins* is the national flag; but the desires marshaled around it are not forsaken. Instead, they continue to pulse through Cephas's fragile structure. In the wake of the highly modern evocation of "traditional" ethnic difference in service to genocidal violence, the novel puts in place a modernity infused with the past. Thus does *The Stone Virgins* rewrite the project of forgetting taken up by the urban subjects of *Butterfly Burning*, for whom the "past is sealed off no matter how purposeful it has been, even if the past is only yesterday. It cannot be consulted for comparison" (*Butterfly* 45). While Fumbatha resists the modern rallying call that "[t]o build something new you must be prepared to destroy the past" (*Butterfly* 20), he does so in a misguided manner that sees him attempting to appropriate Phephelaphi's reproductive potential as mnemonic tool: only if Phephelaphi bore his children, he thinks, would he "dream new dreams" that do not conclude with the haunting image of his father's body dropping from the trees into the river; after she aborts, "he dreams of a lake of light and sees his father drown" (111–12). Cephas, in contrast, is able to recuperate the value of both Fumbatha's and Phephelaphi's dreams, without requiring the subjection of women's bodies in order to bring them to fruition.

The two novels present us with three resonant emblems of writing the self into modernity. The first coheres around Phephelaphi's abortive efforts to do so in the colonial context:

She stumbles and falls. No shoes. It is winter in mid-June. Her foot hooks against a sheet of metal left outside the grounds at United School. *Blood on her writing pad spreading from her fingers*; she has wiped clean her injured foot with her bare hands. (109; emphasis added)

More hopeful are the "writing" projects taken up by Nonceba and Cephas in the postindependence city, namely Nonceba's "pedestrian enunciation," which rewrites the cityscape through which she walks by emphasizing its perambulatory potential rather than its panoptic power, and Cephas's elegiac restorative gesture, which comes to stand as an emblem for the kind of writing that *The Stone Virgins* performs.

Cephas's "writing" articulates a dual project: one in which modernity is no longer in flight from the past, and one that aims to create an authentic modernity in the wake of a fraudulent colonial, and later nationalist, modernity that has ruthlessly "weeded out" ambiguity and plurality in search of homogeneity. Instead of taking up what Zygmunt Bauman identifies as the "weeding" project of modernity (see 26–39), Cephas *weaves* branches and grasses together. And, as in Berman's case studies, the project of modernity is shifted from one that turns resolutely from the past (exemplified by Phephelaphi, who is thus doomed to circular entrapment and repetition),¹⁶ to one that imbues the present with a sense of the past (see Berman 332). This should not be confused with a sentimental, nativist retreat into the past. Rather, it should be understood, states Berman, as an attempt to

'bring it all back' into the past, that is, to bring to bear on their past the selves they have become in the present, to bring into those old homes visions and values that may clash radically with them—and maybe to re-enact the very tragic struggles that drove them from their homes in the first place. (333)

Modernists, he concludes, "can never be done with the past: they must go on forever haunted by it, digging up its ghosts, recreating it even as they remake their world and themselves" (346). Cephas, then, emerges as the archetypal modern figure, crafting his world and himself in the creative act of weaving past and present together.

Mindful of the treacherous nature of the modern project in the hands of either the colonial or the nation state, Vera's writing of the postindependence city as a place of possibility is, like Cephas's reconstruction, necessarily tentative, and indubitably colored by an awareness of the modern production of "traditional" identity as justification for genocidal violence. Similarly, the freedom of movement that the post-independence city offers Nonceba is tempered always by the description of the constrictions of movement that accompany the declaration of independence: "Every road out of Bulawayo is covered with soldiers and police, teeming like ants. Roadblocks. Landmines. Hand grenades. Memory is lost. Independence ends. Guns rise. Rising anew. In 1981" (*Stone* 68). A genuine restoration of memory is posed as antidote to such state duplicities, and as necessary to the achievement of an authentic postcolonial modernity.

Allowing both the pain and promise of the past to infuse her contemporary urban geographies, Vera's closing city scenes resonate with Gilroy's descriptions of "black musical expression": "The willfully damaged signs which betray the resolutely utopian politics of transfiguration [. . .] partially transcend modernity, constructing both an imaginary anti-modern past and a postmodern yet-to-come" (37). Like the musical forms that infuse Vera's city, and Cephas's relationship to Nonceba, the memorial Cephas crafts sustains but does not contain memory; its fragile, permeable shape stands in marked contrast to the ossified memory enshrined in the "stone virgins" of the novel's title. These two memorials thus encode different potentials for the present. Cephas's is the utopian impulse—the "city yet to come," to quote the title of Simone's magnificent study of urban life in Africa—to be undertaken "the following year." If we read the reconstruction of this ancient kraal as symbol rather than fact, the utopian dream remains deferred; "cool livable places" have yet to be woven. The ethical valence of such historical

reconstructions, which resonate with Vera's presentations of African presence in city space, are pressingly pertinent in our present as the Mugabe regime follows its colonial predecessors in seeking to produce rural Africans through the violent reprisals of Operation Murambatsvina.¹⁷

NOTES

1. The ambiguity in my title is borrowed from Jennifer Robinson's "(Im)mobilizing Space—Dreaming of Change," which usefully reads back into the apartheid city of South Africa, from the perspective of the postapartheid present, the movements and interactions that cut across apartheid spatial controls.

I am grateful to the organizers and participants of the commemorative colloquium on Vera's writing at the Centre for African Literary Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, where an earlier version of this paper was first presented. The research toward this article was financially supported by the National Research Foundation, South Africa. I am grateful also to the University of Stellenbosch for supplementary funding. Any opinion expressed in this chapter is that of the author and the NRF and University of Stellenbosch do not accept any liability in this regard.

2. For a representation of street photography notable both for its differences from and similarities to Vera's, see Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*: "Solomon the township photographer is now a rich man. His studio at the back of the grocer's is papered from floor to ceiling with photographs of Africans in European wigs, Africans in mini-skirts, Africans who pierce the focusing lens with a gaze of paranoia. The background of each photo is the same, waves breaking on a virgin beach and a lone eagle swiveling like glass fracturing light towards the potent spaces of the universe. A cruel yearning that can only be realized in crude photography. The squalor of reality was obliterated in an explosion of flashbulbs and afterwards one could say 'That's me, man—me! In the city.'

Harry must have made a lot of photographers rich. [. . .] 'You and me,' he said drinking, 'we're civilized'" (11).

3. Vera's unfinished novel, *Obedience*, set on the even of 2002 elections, returns to the Railways, which operate now as an emblem of the defeat of dreaming in post-independence Zimbabwe: "On their way to the station they had turned through Fort Street, walking through the dilapidated buildings which were once the pride of every foreign traveler in the 1920s. . . . The Railway Bottle Store. The Railway Baker. The Railway Barber Shop . . . here gossip is rife, mostly about the forthcoming elections. Dreams of independence are far from them, too far. [. . .] They used to long for suits with white shifts and cufflinks, yes, cufflinks and silk ties, *before* independence; in the twenty two years that have gone by they have learned that they will never own anything outside their own breath . . . They travel light, now, free of those dreams. They laugh at themselves in the mirrors of the Railway Barber Shop, seeing how they have aged, really aged, acquired compliant grins [waiting] for that oncoming vote which they know nothing about, feel nothing about and whose slogans leave the tongue stuck to the roof of the mouth" (qtd. in Ranger).

4. Stephen Lubkemann argues, similarly, that for many male Mozambican migrants, "migration's whole purpose now is to make it unnecessary for them to have any single or exclusive anchor point. [. . .] It is what allows men to avoid dependence on conditions at any one place by allowing them to pursue options simultaneously in multiple locations" (47). It is notable that "the conditions" to which he refers include the demands of wives and families; the gendered shapes and effects of migration are a central focus in Vera's writing.

5. See Lizzy Attree's extensive exploration of the functioning of kwela in the novel, which has multiple resonances with the argument presented here.

6. The resonance with DuBois's ambivalent trope of the Pullman porter is notable here (see Gilroy 133).

7. See Joyce Nyairo's discussion of "the ethos of acquisitiveness from many different contexts that propels [the informal sector in Nairobi] and that shapes its urban identities" (3).

8. Lara Allen notes that the ambiguity of the word "kwela" was actively played upon by its practitioners such that it was simultaneously understood as referring to the policing of urban mobility and to "rising in the sense of social emancipation and advancement towards power" (54).

9. It is kwela music, *Butterfly Burning* proclaims, that locates Makokoba township inside Bulawayo (*Butterfly* 3); see also Nuttall for a discussion of the "ways in which the township gradually comes to disassemble and reassemble the city" (179).

10. *Skokiaan* was composed by August Musarurwa of the Bulawayo Sweet Rhythms Band in 1947. David Coplan notes that "it became an international success, topping the American Hit Parade as 'Happy Africa' in 1954" (154). Armstrong first recorded *Skokiaan* in New York in 1954; that he did so with his All Stars band adds another layer of resonance to Vera's Star Photo Studio. As a *tsaba-tsaba* jazz piece, *Skokiaan* references multiple points of origin and adaptation. Thomas Turino observes: "'Skokiaan' thus exemplifies the emergent, synthetic nature of cosmopolitanism, and jazz as a cosmopolitan genre, in a particularly clear way. Although still associated with its African-American or American origins, by the post-World War II era jazz had been diffused to many places in the world, had taken root, and had given rise to myriad local variants. [...] Moving beyond mere imitation of foreign models, Musarurwa and other southern African musicians created their own brand of 'jazz' or 'jive' and pieces that could then feed back through cosmopolitan loops (recordings, tours) to 'The Source' (Armstrong) as well as to multiple other sites with their own local variants (the merengue version in the Dominican Republic). Musarurwa's contribution was attractive to and *constructive* of cosmopolitan jazz both for the 'local' southern African difference that it provided and for its base in and similarity to the larger tradition that allowed for its recognition and inclusion" (141; emphasis in original).

11. Gilroy mentions the "two-way traffic" between African and the diaspora, but his attention falls squarely on African-American cultural forms (199; see Chrisman 8).

12. See Simone: "Even under the general assumption that cities were for Europeans and the rural areas for Africans, economic necessity meant that supplies of African labor had to be located in the city. Thus, an ongoing tension ensued between the cultivation of stable African quarters, behaviors, and identities and the maintenance of a certain instability that would deter Africans from making the city their own" (*For* 142).

13. See Simone: "Cities came to be the means through which bodies were turned into individuals" (*For the City* 144).

14. The example de Certeau employs to state his case is, interestingly, that of the colonization of the "new world": "Submissive, and even consenting to their subjection, the Indians nevertheless often *made of* the rituals something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind" (xiii).

15. Zeleza mentions "the conquest diasporas (the Ngugi in southern Africa)" as one of the five African diasporic movements that complicate and extend the notion of diaspora explored in Gilroy's study (45).

16. Ranka Primorac notes of both Phephelaphi and Mazvita that they "make two basic spatio-temporal mistakes: they fail to realize the circumscribed nature of physical space available to them, and they assume that time is linear and disjointed" (90). Phephelaphi's physical movements around Makokoba are found to be "quasi-circular," mimicking her fate of being "caught twice in the identical set of circumstances that pulls her back from her dream of progress" (Primorac 90–91).

17. Writing of ZANU-PF's "drastic campaign which swept through the urban areas of the country from May to July 2005" under the name Operation Murambatsvina, which can mean either "Drive out the Rubbish" or "Restore Order," Deborah Potts claims that "nothing on this scale in such a short duration has ever been witnessed in urban Africa, not excluding apartheid South Africa" (274–75). Potts identifies three root causes for this unprecedented demolition of urban dwellings, which resonate uncannily with colonial policy: "a desire to punish the urban areas for their almost universal tendency since 2000 to vote for the opposition MDC; an ideological adherence to modernist planning and the associated image of a 'modern' city; and a desire to decrease the presence of the poorest urban people, by driving them out of the towns" (291).

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