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THE SPIRIT OF CULTURE: A DECONSTRUCTIVE ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS OF
YVONNE VERA'S *NEHANDA*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will utilize deconstructive ecofeminist theory to analyze Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda.* Deconstructive ecofeminists believe that non-oppressive societies can be created through deconstructing binaries and adopting a mutual self perspective. This ideological shift will lead to a non-oppressive society by creating a care ethic that is based on equality and mutual reciprocity. Applying deconstructive ecofeminist theory to the text will demonstrate how British colonization caused Nehanda's community to shift from a collectivist society to an individualistic society. This shift is significant because it will demonstrate how Vera uses the historical context of the novel to reconcile colonial domination and create a new ecofeminist postcolonial consciousness.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis analyzes Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* from a deconstructive ecofeminist perspective. Ecofeminists believe that the domination of women is related to the domination of the environment. The term "environment" signifies a complex ecosystem that is comprised of the land, humans and animals. Unlike mainstream ecology, ecofeminism also includes spiritual and cultural relationships as a part of the environment. In her article "Deconstructive Ecofeminism: A Japanese Critical Interpretation" Masatsugu Maruyama discusses "deconstructive ecofeminism" and argues that it has three main objectives for creating a non-oppressive society. The first objective is the deconstruction of dualisms as they create hierarchies. The second objective is a mutual self, which is beneficial for understanding how individuals are connected to each other and the environment. The third objective is the care ethic, which creates societal values based on trust, care and mutual reciprocity (178).

Typically, deconstructive ecofeminists analyze current institutions, social norms etc… to reveal hierarchies and sites of oppression. *Nehanda* is a special case because it depicts Nehanda's village as a pre-colonial heaven. Nehanda's people have a culture through which they become intimately connected to the land, animals, their ancestors and each other. Nehanda's community exemplifies the ecofeminist ideal of a non-oppressive society. It is only after the physical domination of Nehanda that the British are able to take over the Zimbabwean land. Historically, British colonization was a form of economic oppression; however, in the novel it is only demonstrated as a form of cultural and ideological domination as Nehanda's people are forced to convert to Christianity and

adopt British customs and ideology. This domination oppressed Nehanda's community through binary oppositions, the narcissistic self and a consumer ethic—ultimately changing the relationship between Nehanda's people and the land. Applying deconstructive ecofeminist theory will demonstrate how Vera uses the historical context of the novel in order to reconcile colonial domination and demonstrate a new ecofeminist postcolonial consciousness.

Chapter two, "History in *Nehanda*" is a brief introduction to Zimbabwe's history as it pertains to the novel. Providing some historic background will be useful for understanding the historical context of the novel. Although *Nehanda* is based on actual events, much of the novel is historically inaccurate. Analyzing these differences will be helpful for making meaningful interpretations about the novel. These interpretations will be of primary importance for understanding the complex relationship between Nehanda's people and the environment as well as the significance of women and land within the text.

Chapters three, four and five will provide the bulk of the deconstructive ecofeminist analysis. *Nehanda* is a highly transformative novel and, as a result, each of these chapters are organized with "Pre-colonization" and "Colonization" sections. These sections will be useful for illustrating the ideological transformation that occurs within the text. "Pre-colonization" will include the ideology of Nehanda's people before the community loses contact with her. "Colonization" will demonstrate the ideological shift that occurs in the novel, largely through subtle instances and Vera's use of language. Commentary on British ideology as it appears in the text will be used throughout both

sections, regardless of when the instances occur in the text, in order to provide a meaningful interpretation of the novel.

Chapter three, "Deconstruction of Binaries," will provide a discussion on the effects that binary oppositions in *Nehanda* had on the environment. This chapter will begin with a brief introduction to ecofeminist perspectives on binary oppositions and how "difference" has had an effect on the liberation of women and the land. The "Pre-colonization" section will demonstrate how the absence of binary categories in Nehanda's community creates a cyclic understanding of the environment. This cyclic understanding is explored through Vera's dialectical interpretation of life and death; human versus animal; past and present; and masculine versus feminine categorizations. The "Colonization" section will demonstrate how the ideological domination of the British created binary oppositions in Nehanda's community.

Chapter four, "The Mutual Self," will demonstrate how British colonization changed the relationship between Nehanda's people and the land. The chapter will begin with a brief introduction to ecofeminist perspectives on the "mutual self" and the effects that individualist thinking has on the environment. The "Pre-colonization" section will demonstrate the community's mutual self perspective and contrast it to the British egotistic self within the text. The "Colonization" section will demonstrate how British colonization transformed Nehanda's community into an individualist society. This will be done by utilizing Emile Durkheim's totemic principle in order to demonstrate how the physical domination of Nehanda led to the ideological domination of her community.

Chapter Five, "The Care Ethic," will demonstrate how colonization marginalized Nehanda's people and the effect this had on their relationship to the land. This section

will begin with a brief introduction to ecofeminist perspectives on the care ethic. The "Pre-colonization" section will demonstrate how Nehanda's community embodied the care ethic. The care ethic will be explored on a spiritual level through the community's relationship with animals, the British and the land. The "Colonization" section will demonstrate how the British domination of the land marginalized Nehanda's people and how it caused them to become "disinherited."

This essay will conclude by demonstrating how Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* is significant for contemporary post-colonial societies as Vera transforms the past into the present. This section will draw upon the transformative qualities of the text in order to demonstrate how *Nehanda* acts as a totem for the reader in order to share a new postcolonial consciousness that is based on ecofeminist theory. Special reference will be given to Gloria Anzaldua's "La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness" in order to provide a meaningful framework for this interpretation.

CHAPTER 2

History in *Nehanda*

Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* is a historic retelling of the life and death of the Nehanda. According to David Beach's article, "An Innocent Woman Unjustly Accused? Charwe, Medium of the Nehanda Mhondoro Spirit, and the 1896-97 Central Shona Rising in Zimbabwe," the medium's real name was Charwe and she led her community in war against the British in Zimbabwe's First Independence War in 1896-1987. The British believed she was responsible for ordering the execution of a British officer. Eventually she was arrested and given a trial. Unfortunately, she was found guilty and hung. Even though there were other spirit mediums involved in the war, some of who were also mediums of the Nehanda Mhondoro spirit, Beach suggests that Charwe has become a national icon in Zimbabwe because during her incarceration she refused to convert to Christianity (52). Although she is commonly referred to as Nehanda, Charwe is an important figure in contemporary Zimbabwe. According to Lene Bull-Christiansen's book, *Tales of the Nation: Feminist Nationalism or Patriotic History? Defining National History and Identity in Zimbabwe*, the Nehanda medium was a primary figure during the 1980s when Zimbabwe became a recognized independent nation and was often used by Prime Minister Robert Mugabe as a way to create a national identity (60). The Nehanda medium Charwe has undoubtedly been an important figure for Zimbabwean women as well as Zimbabwean history.

Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda*, although based on actual historic events, is far from being historically accurate. The novel is more of Vera's interpretation of history and noting the discrepancies between the novel and traditional history will be helpful for

interpreting the novel. Specifically, analyzing the interpretation of history in the text will help interpret the significance of women in the novel as well as the relationship between Nehanda's people and the land. This is important because it will show that Vera's novel does not "revisit the past" in order to shape it from an epistemological standpoint; instead, Vera uses the novel to transform the past as an act of reconciliation.

Women

Vera's ecofeminist historic retelling creates complicated questions about the novel's historical significance due to its over fictionalization. As Paul Zeleza notes in his article, "Colonial Fictions: Memory and History in Yvonne Vera's Imagination," that "African history has been central to the ontological and epistemic project of trying to rid the African geopolitical self and its past of erasures, omissions, fabrications, stereotypes, and silences of imperialist historiography" (11). Vera does provide a reinterpretation of history; however, her fictionalizations can be interpreted in a way that marginalizes women. For instance, Nana Wilson-Tagoe notes that *Nehanda* is a "woman-centered world" (164). However, due to its fictionalization of history, *Nehanda* is more of a woman-centered perspective of history rather than a woman-centered history. For instance, historically, the British reported Nehanda acted hysterically during her trial as she was jumping and screaming inside the courtroom (Beach, 45). However, in Vera's version, Nehanda is imprisoned and dancing is a part of her spirituality. While inside her jail cell, Nehanda retaliates against Mr. Browning.

> She has heard the drums, and now she will dance the histories of her people. She dances against Mr. Browning and his God, against these strangers who have taken the land, she dances the faces of her people, the betrayal of time, the growth of wisdom, the glory of their survival—a shadow moving on the wall. She dances in

harmony with the departed who protect the soil from the feet of strangers. Thorns dig deep beneath her feet and she bursts into song. Then she lets out a scream that sends Mr. Browning across the other side of the room. Mr. Browning is convinced of her madness. (95)

Nehanda's actions are humanized and she is given agency and motive. Here, Vera's retelling works successfully to reinterpret historical events; Nehanda's actions are not "tribal incivility" but rather a peaceful form of cultural retaliation.

However, there are many other instances in the text where Vera's interpretation actually marginalizes women in history. Helen Mugambi states in her article, "Zimbabwe Feminist Art and the Politics of Revolution" that, "Vera's novel epitomizes how such works can provide intellectual, activist and feminist visions that reclaim women's authorial voice and power within the domestic arena" (425). However, this is an inaccurate assumption from a historical perspective as Vera's fictionalization of Nehanda may actually be marginalizing women within the domestic arena. For instance, Charwe was married, had three children and was reasonably young when she was executed (Beach, 29). However, in Vera's version, Nehanda refused to marry, never had children and aged dramatically, perhaps 20 years, within seconds during a spiritual intercession. This is significant because according to Elizabeth Schmidt's book *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* traditionally women gained status in the Shona culture through becoming a grandparent and it was very rare for a woman to gain the status of a spirit medium. Aging and menopause were also important signs of status because it symbolized the woman's body becoming more masculine (23). In many ways Vera's masculinization of Nehanda limits women's power and authority by reinforcing the traditional gender and status hierarchies.

The novel also marginalizes women from a historical perspective due to their lack of representation. While it is undoubtedly certain that women are always present in the novel, the novel really does nothing to demonstrate women's historical position in society or to give them a voice in history. According to Schmidt, Shona families were polygamous and there was a status hierarchy between the women of any given family and the women within the larger community. Women were often sold as slaves and worked in their family's fields. Accusations of witchcraft were common and were often made by other women in the family (24). The women in Vera's novel undoubtedly take care of children, tend fields and cook but it also overlooks the harsh realities women were subject to at the hands of other women. This is significant because female solidarity is prevalent throughout the novel. The women draw strength from each other and women must rely on each other while their husbands are away fighting the British (78). In her article, "Zimbabwe Feminist Art and the Politics of Revolution," Helen Mugambi notes, "[Vera] underscores the female solidarity necessary for the success of the feminist struggle" (430). Although Vera's novel is set in history it has more implications for addressing Zimbabwe as a postcolonial society than it does for retelling national history. Jytte Nhanenge suggests in her book, *Ecofeminism: Toward Integrating the Concerns of Women Poor People, and Nature into Development*, that female solidarity is important for creating a non-oppressive society. She states, "(Women) can celebrate all of those feminine aspects, which the *[sic]* patriarchy has devalued. The aim is to re-empower women and create a caring society, without the domination of people and nature" (102). It seems that, instead of providing a meaningful insight on the past, Vera's *Nehanda* tries to transform the past as a way to inform the present. Her fictional depiction of women in

the novel undoubtedly plays a central role in this transformation by omitting historical hierarchies and showcasing female solidarity a source of strength and empowerment.

Land

Vera weaves ecofeminist theory into history in order to give the reader a different historical perspective of colonialism, Nehanda's culture (the Shona culture) and the environment. But this perspective creates complicated questions about the relationship between history, the Shona culture and the land within the text. For instance, Julie Cairnie notes the importance of land in her article, "Women and the Literature of Settlement and Plunder: Toward an Understanding of the Zimbabwean Land Crisis," and states that, "(Nehanda) bears witness to the confiscation and desecration of their ancestral lands....[This] reconfigures land as a possession of black women" (184). In her astute analysis, she focuses on the significance of the land as a material object and argues that colonialism displaced black women from land ownership. Her analysis of *Nehanda* provides an accurate description of the affects of colonialism yet there are contradictions between her view of land ownership and the significance of land within the text. For instance, Vera writes, "We allow him to dig for gold, but the land is not his. The land cannot be owned. We cannot give him any land because the land does not belong to the living" (36). Nehanda's people do not believe the land is a material that anyone can possess. This raises questions about the significance of land in *Nehanda*, particularly since the end of the novel predicts that in the future Nehanda's people will "speak in voices that claim their inheritances" (94). If land is not to be owned then what is it that Nehanda's people will seek to inherit? Nehanda proclaims, "Reluctantly, we witnessed

the slow invasion of the land. Our eyes sought comfort, but the skies accused us of neglect. Empty enclosures replaced our ancient claim. Our ancestors say they have been abandoned, and when we worship, our voices can no longer reach them" (50). This is significant because it shows that Nehanda's people are not seeking to reclaim the land as a material possession. Instead, her people seek to reclaim a lost cultural and spiritual connection within the land because they have become "disinherited" by their ancestors.

Understanding this difference is key for interpreting *Nehanda* and the community's collectivist ideology; however, it is important to note that, contrary to Vera's version, some historians have stated that, during Zimbabwe's First Independence War, the Shona were not just fighting for their ancestral lands but they were primarily fighting against British taxation and forced labor (Beach, 32). This is an important distinction because Vera's novel hardly discusses, if not completely excludes, these topics in her historic retelling. Colonialism in *Nehanda* was not a form of economic domination but a form of cultural and ideological domination. After Nehanda's people lose their land, they lose their connection with the departed and in order to survive they must convert to Christianity. For Vera, colonialism was not a loss of economic resources but a "disinheritance," or a loss of cultural and ideological perspectives.

Chapter 3

Deconstruction of Binaries

The deconstruction of binary oppositions is of upmost importance in ecofeminism because ecofeminists believe that binaries are the primary mode through which women, the Other (marginalized communities, people) and nature become dominated. Jytte Nhanenge describes this relationship between domination and dualisms further in her book *Ecofeminism: Towards Integrating the Concerns of Women, Poor People and Nature into Development.* She suggests that binary oppositions create a hierarchal value system that determines "superior" and "inferior" statuses, such as male-female, culture-nature, human-animal and civilized-primitive. The superior status is associated with reason—something purposeful, calculated and powerful—while the inferior status is associated with nature—something wild, emotional and subordinate. These dualisms end up creating a logic system that provides justification for dominating and exploiting women, the Other and nature (111).

While binaries are constructed through difference, ecofeminists do not believe "sameness" will lead to equality. In her book, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters*, Karen Warren states:

> Arrogant perception of others presupposes and maintains *sameness* in such a way that it expands the moral community only to those who are taught to resemble be like, similar to, or the same as) 'us' in some morally significant way. An ethic based on arrogant perception thereby builds a moral hierarchy of beings and assumes some common denominator of moral considerability by virtue of which like beings deserve similar treatment or moral consideration and unlike beings do not. Such an ethic generates a "unity in sameness" position. (105)

This suggests that trying to create equality by rejecting differences will end up imposing normative standards and creating more oppression. Warren notes that in order to create equality, binaries need to be eliminated, however, differences need to be acknowledge and respected, rather than "erased." She states:

> Ecofeminist philosophy denies the 'nature/culture' split and the claim that humans are totally separate and different from non-human nature: it recognizes that humans, as ecological selves, are both members of an ecological community (in some respects) and different from other members of that community (in other respects). Accordingly, the attention of ecofeminist ethics to relationships and to community is not an erasure of difference but a respectful acknowledgement of it. (100)

Deconstructing binaries does not lead to the "erasure" of differences but it promotes acknowledging differences and similarities in order to highlight the interdependency between humans, animals and nature.

This ecofeminist perspective on duality will provide a basis for understanding the creation of binaries in Nehanda and the effects that this had on the environment. In this analysis, the environment is not limited to the physical land but humans, animals and culture are also included. The "Pre-colonization" section will provide a basis for understanding how Vera uses a cyclic understanding of the environment to create a world without binary oppositions. The "Colonization" section will describe how British ideological domination created binary oppositions in Nehanda's community and the effect that this had on the environment.

Pre-colonization

Vera uses a cyclic understanding of the environment to create a world without binary oppositions. She does this by using figurative language to demonstrate the fluidity between binaries, such as past and present; life and death; human versus animal; and

male versus female. Her interpretation includes the fluidity between the dichotomies but in a way that is transformative. This fluidity creates a view in which there is little to no linearity as nothing is finite. Nothing living ever dies; it only transitions or adapts. This transformative cycle happens consistently throughout the text.

Vera's *Nehanda* demonstrates the fluidity between the past and the present in a variety of ways. The narrator states, "The calabash, which holds the memories for the future, carries signs of lasting beauty. Forgetting is not easy for those who travel in both directions of time" (3). Vera writes it "holds memories for the future" (3) because in the future it will be a symbol of the past, similar to an artifact. This allows the calabash pot to be in a perpetual state of transformation. It is simultaneously in the past, the present and the future. This is important because it demonstrates how the past, the present and the future are not mutually exclusive. Vera does this to create a tie between the history, the present and the future in a way that creates a cyclic view of time. This is important because it gives depth and meaning towards understanding how the present is created within a historical context and has an effect on the future. This fluidity is important because it demonstrates a transformative perspective that involves taking action by using planning and foresight rather than tradition and retrospection alone. This is an important distinction and will be revisited in the "Conclusion" to demonstrate the significance of Vera's ecofeminist postcolonial consciousness.

In many instances the past and the present overlap with life and death. An example of this is the community's reliance on the spirits of their departed ancestors. Contrary to Western ideology, death in *Nehanda* does not represent a state of finality. Death is rather a transformation or a state of becoming. "Her death, which is also birth,

will weigh on those lives remaining to be lived" (93). Here, even as Nehanda prepares for her spirit to depart, death is not an end to life but is rather an extension of it. In Nehanda's community, the departed guide the living (53) and Nehanda is preparing for her new role in life. Physical death is more of how this transformation occurs. The overlapping fluidity between life, death, history and the present is abundant in Nehanda's culture as their ancestors are simultaneously a part of present life and in the remembered in history (53). However, "death" becomes an important metaphor in the "Colonization" section of this chapter, although it does not refer to the body's physical death. Demonstrating this complex cyclic view is important in Vera's perspective and will be discussed again in Chapter 4 as a part of Vera's mutual self perspective.

Despite the apparent gendered division of labor, *Nehanda* offers no clear distinction between masculine and feminine characteristics. Women are responsible for taking care of children, preparing meals and farming (22) and the men are primarily responsible for fighting in war (78). However, there is no clear division between masculinity and femininity. Nehanda is a woman who cries and leads her community into war (56). Kaguvi is a male spirit medium who also cries and fights against the British (89). The fluidity of gender is important in *Nehanda* and Vera uses it to create a community without a gender hierarchy. There are gender specific jobs but these jobs do not imply social worth, such as women are beneath men. This is important because, as previously discussed, Zimbabwe historically had a gender hierarchy. It seems that Vera showcases Zimbabwe history without a gender hierarchy as part of her cyclic perspective on the environment and it places women and men in a state of mutual interdependence.

This is an important distinction and will be discussed again in Chapter 5 to illustrate the care ethic.

The distinction between humans and nonhumans, particularly animals, is rarely defined in Vera's novel and at times animals are used to describe humans in the novel. For instance, it is difficult to interpret whether Nehanda is being hunted by an animal or chased by the British:

> On the opposite side of the cave, hovering above her in the darkness, sits a large bird. She does not see it, yet she can feel its presence. Its eyes move over her body, waiting to destroy her. Then she hears the flapping of heavy wings, and the air inside moves. She listens intently for the bird to move once more, so that she will know where to direct her scorn. The spirits are with her, shielding her against ruin. She hears claws scraping the ground, and sand flying against the walls. She opens her eyes and seeks the animal, but it is one with the darkness. (68)

Interpreting this description is complicated after her community returns to the cave and finds Nehanda is missing. "Around the cave, they see footsteps of the white men. The signs of the white man's presence send fear through their hearts. The footprints have gone round their sacred grounds, which is no longer sacred after this abomination by the strangers" (Vera, 74). Vera lets the reader know that the British were in the cave but the relationship between the large bird in the cave and the British remains utterly ambiguous. Instances such as this happen throughout the text to describe both the actions of the British and Nehanda's community. Due to its ambiguity, it is difficult to interpret the significance of this fluidity. However, one interpretation could be that, perhaps, humans have animalistic tendencies and animals have human qualities. In this way, there are no real differences between humans and animals. The previous description of Nehanda being hunted in the cave demonstrates that humans display animalistic qualities in the novel. In another instance, Nehanda's community have an understanding with the

nonhuman environment and Vera describes this connection as an act of communication, something considered uniquely human in individualistic societies.

> Voices throughout the forest speak to Kaguvi with wavering silvery-bottomed leaves and flaming flowers. Rocks bear the faces of his ancestors, the horizon tells him which path to take to avoid his enemies, the black crow shows him what spaces in the forest will protect and heal him. He borrows messages from the riverbanks where the sharp-edged reeds wave, and the water tumbles over an uneven bed. (60)

Similar to the departed spirits, the environment is guiding and acting on the living. Kaguvi, a male spirit medium, is receiving messages from the environment and uses it to guide him. The fluidity between human and nonhuman dismantles the hierarchy in which humans dominate the earth. This is demonstrated consistently throughout the novel as the village leaders state, "There is no man that lives among other men who has his own animal. We are all born together" (35). This works in Vera's cyclic perspective to demonstrate that humans and nonhumans are interdependent. This is an important distinction and it will be recalled again in Chapter 5 to discuss the care ethic.

Interestingly, this passage in particular demonstrates the total effect of deconstructed binaries in Vera's cyclic perspective. Kaguvi is in a state of dependence (masculine versus feminine) and seeks help through the environment. He sees his ancestors within the land (life and death; past and present). The crow and the horizon direct Kaguvi's journey (human vs. non human). This is important because it demonstrates the reciprocity and fluidity between the categories and will be useful for understanding how Colonialism had an effect on this cyclic perspective.

Colonialism

In *Nehanda,* one of the subtlest affects of Colonialism on Nehanda's community is the construction of binary oppositions. It is difficult to examine in novel primarily because only a small part of the novel directly reflects it. Similar to the rest of the novel, the construction of binaries in Nehanda's community is mostly implied. For instance, Nehanda tells her community, "It is the envying eye that will destroy us, that will change us entirely. We can become stronger and whole if we believe in our own traditions. [....] The tradition of the stranger shall destroy us" (67). This does not reflect the construction of binaries specifically, however, it is useful for understanding how Vera illustrates Colonialism as a form of cultural or ideological domination. This is an important distinction because Vera illustrates the assimilation of binary categories as an effect of converting to Christianity. For instance, after Kaguvi is taken captive by the British he pretends to convert to Christianity (86). Vera uses this to demonstrate the construction of binaries.

> His ancient spirit, which he now sees as something separate from himself, weights sorrowfully on him. It is as though they now live in separate ages of time, himself in the present, his spirit departing further into the past. They move in both directions of time, and they will not find each other. Before today, Kaguvi has ridden on the back of the spirit. Now he can only see short distances to his right and to his left, backwards and forwards. (88)

Kaguvi never appears to believe in Christianity indefinitely. However, the British have created a divide between him and his culture. He even begins to think in binary oppositions as he is in the present and his ancestral spirit is the past. Even though Kaguvi never accepts the British traditions, his contact with them changed his perspective on his own traditions. Colonization did not end the community's beliefs, but transformed them.

It is difficult to say if the assimilation of British ideology actually "destroyed" the community (67). However, it is unquestionably clear that Colonization affected the community's perspective. This is important because it primarily transformed the community's cyclic view on the environment. Vera demonstrates this transformation by transforming the language of the text. For instance, at the beginning of the book, Vera writes, "It moved at once in opposite directions, with time and against time, collapsing all time within its perturbed interior" (2). This passage reflects Nehanda being born but Vera describes it without binary oppositions. At the end of the book, Vera's language, while still figurative, is much less ambiguous. "Her death, which is also birth, will weigh on those lives remaining to be lived" (93). Here, the cyclic view remains in tact. Yet, Vera uses binary oppositions to describe it. The cyclic view did not change but Nehanda's perspective of it did. This is important because it demonstrates that British ideology has been assimilated into the community's ideology through colonization. This distinction is important and will be discussed again in Chapter 4 to demonstrate the mutual self and also provide some meaningful insights in the Conclusion.

Summary

Ecofeminist believe that it is important to deconstruct binary oppositions in order to create a non-oppressive society. Binary oppositions cause oppression by creating hierarchies. Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* demonstrates a cyclic view of the environment by demonstrating the fluidity between binary oppositions, such as past and present; masculine versus feminine; life and death; and human versus nonhuman. For Vera, British Colonization was a form of ideological imprisonment and she demonstrates this

by illustrating how Colonization transformed the community's perspective.   Binary oppositions became assimilated into the community's cyclic view.   Understanding this transformation will be important for addressing the rest of the novel.

Chapter 4

The Mutual Self

Ecofeminists believe that the key to a non-oppressive society is through the creation of the mutual self. The mutual self is a non-dualized perspective that works to create respect and reciprocity between all beings (Nhanenge, 142). Ecofeminists believe that the mutual self is the key for creating the care ethic within society because it allows individuals to understand how they are connected to one another and the environment (Maruyama, 178). In this way, the mutual self is important because it corrects the patriarchal construct of the individualist self and creates a new definition of self that is based on collectivity.

Ecofeminists believe that the individualist self, also referred to as the egoistic self, is a perspective that sustains the domination of women, Others and the environment (Nhanenge, 141). In her book, *Ecofeminism: Towards Integrating the Concerns of Women, Poor People, and Nature into Development*, Jytte Nhanenge describes how the patriarchal definition of "person" has created this oppression. She writes that the patriarchal construct of "person" is created through binary oppositions of "self" and "Other." She describes the consequences of this perspective further, stating:

> Reasons to consider the other morally required a cancelling out of differences between the self and the other. If the other has the label as self, the egoistic self can recognize the other ethically. Those we cannot mark as self we return to the heap of instrumental, useful ones, outside any ethical consideration. This resulted in the exploitation of the feminine category including women, Others, and nature. (441)

This is significant because it demonstrates how the patriarchal definition of "person" creates an individualistic understanding of both society and the environment while

differences are used to rationalize inequality, oppression and exploitation. The individualistic self is a perspective that sustain hierarchies by placing the "self" above the environment by insturmentalizing and exploiting the Other (Maruyama, 178). In other words, women, Others and the environment become exploited because they are different from and less valuable than the egotistic self.

In contrast, the ecofeminist perspective of the mutual self works to create equality by fostering a collectivist perspective. The mutual self is a non-dualized construct that acknowledges differences to create reciprocity and respect. Jytte Nhanenge describes this further stating:

> The ecofeminist non-dualised definition of a person is oppositely including differences, which leads to an ethics of care. Recognition of and respect for the intrinsic value of the other is an essential element in an ethics of care. An adequate account of the mutual self must recognize both the otherness of the other and his continuity with the self. An ecological self would also find that the thriving of nature is related to the self's own thriving. (442)

Unlike the individualistic self, the mutual self acknowledges differences in order to understand how the self and others are intricately connected to one another. In this way, the mutual self highlights the interdependence of humans, animals and nature rather than working to justify the exploitation of them. Contrary to the egotistic self, women, Others and the environment became as valued as the "self" because of the interdependence between them.

Analyzing *Nehanda* will illustrate how Vera uses the novel to illustrate the mutual self perspective. The "Pre-colonization" section will compare the community's mutual self perspective to the British individualistic perspective. The "Colonization" section will demonstrate how the domination of Nehanda led to the domination of the environment.

This domination creates a shift from a collectivist society towards an individualistic society and will be evident by analyzing Nehanda as a "totem" within the text.

Pre-colonization

Vera illustrates the mutual self perspective very concretely within the text by demonstrating how the community's collectivist perspective differed from the British individualistic perspective. For instance, when the British are first referenced in the text they are described as humans.   The narrator states, "A stranger, but a human nevertheless" (9).   The British are immediately humanized although Nehanda's people recognize that the British are different. Even though the British are taking over the land, Nehanda's community still has a very humanistic view of them.   The village women state:

> We discovered that the stranger had decided to stay among us. The stranger became a sign of our future. What does it mean to have a stranger, with unknown customs, live among you? To live I say, not to visit? [....] He had taken many cattle away from us. He had moved us into the barren part of our land where crops would not grow. Many people were killed by the stranger. [....] Why would the stranger choose to build on the hill, instead of below it? A visitor to a strange land must be humble enough not to choose the highest ground in the land to build his home. These people could not have known our customs. (9-10)

Here, instead of dehumanizing the British, Nehanda's community tries to understand what their relationship is to the British. Even though some of the community has been forced off of their land by the British, Nehanda's community is still viewing them from a perspective of reciprocity by being understanding of the British. It is important to note that because the community is trying to be understanding of British behavior does not mean that they are accepting or approving of their behavior. The British, even though

they are called strangers, are not seen as "below" Nehanda's community. The sentence, "The stranger became a sign of our future" (9), demonstrates how the community viewed the British from a mutual self perspective as the British are now interconnected to the community and the community's future. This is significant because it demonstrates that the actions of the British will affect the community and vice versa. The community's collectivist perspective demonstrates their cyclic worldview by illustrating the fluidity of "self and other" by making the British an integral part of the community's future and vice versa.

Contrary to this, in the novel the British demonstrate the individualistic self. This is evident as the British turn Nehanda's community into the Other. For instance, the narrator states:

> (Mr. Browning) can hear his servant, Moses, moving about in the next room. Moses had once told Mr. Browning his heathen name, but Mr. Browning can see no point in using it. The new name is easier to remember, and more importantly, it is a step toward the goal of civilizing the country. Like the embryonic garden outside Mr. Browning's window, the name creates a space in which Mr. Browning can feel comfortable. (37)

This demonstrates the individualistic self as Mr. Browning has turned Nehanda's community into the "uncivilized Other." Instead of respecting and understanding the community's traditions, the British place primary importance on changing them. In Mr. Browning's world, the only way he can begin to respect Nehanda's community is through how much they emulate his own culture. This is made evident throughout the novel as Mr. Browning believes it is his duty to "introduce order and culture" (46) to Nehanda's people. By not respecting the community's culture differences, the British just assume the community does not have a culture or that it is not worthy of understanding. The

British perspective that the community is "uncivilized" rationalizes their oppression. The community becomes a tool the British try to control rather than an extension of their own lives. This will be an important distinction for demonstrating the care ethic in Chapter 5.

Colonization

After the British capture Nehanda, the community is forced to shift from a collectivist society towards an individualistic society. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, "Deconstruction of Binaries," through colonization, British ideology does not completely replace the community's cultural ideology, rather, it is assimilated into it. This is important for understanding how the domination of Nehanda causes her community to shift towards an individualistic society. Unlike some other transformations within *Nehanda*, this shift is very subtle and requires close analysis of the text.

Demonstrating this shift requires understanding how Nehanda acted as a "totem" for her community. In Daniel Pals' book, *Eight Theories of Religion*, he discusses the major aspects of Emile Durkheim's totemic principle. He states, "Behind the totem is an impersonal force that possesses enormous power, both physical and moral, over the life of the clan. People respect it; they feel morally obligated to observe its ceremonies; and through it they feel tightly bound to each other in deep and abiding loyalty" (99). As a spirit medium, Nehanda becomes a totem for her community because she acts as a bridge between the community and their departed ancestors. It is through her that the community is able to communicate with the departed and receive guidance from them. For instance, the Nehanda states:

> I am among you. I carry the message of retribution. The land must be cleansed with your blood. [....] She tells them what those who had gone before have said,

and what the future holds for them. [....] The crowd recognizes and salutes the spirit medium that has been sent to them for the sake of their relief. They are pleased because this means they have not been entirely abandoned. (51-52)

Here, Nehanda is a totem for her community as she connects the community and the departed. As a totem, she exemplifies the concept of the mutual self by illustrating the interconnection between herself, the community and the departed. For instance, the departed ancestors are dependent on the community to cleanse the land. The community is dependent on Nehanda to receive the powers and messages of the departed. Without her, the community does not know how to fight the British and they risk becoming abandoned and disinherited by their ancestors. This exemplifies the mutual self because the decisions that are made within the community are made collectively.

However, the community begins to shift from being a collectivist society towards an individualistic society after Nehanda is taken prisoner by the British because they lose their connection with the departed. The narrator states:

And the dead are among them, but there is no one to interpret the messages which come from beyond. [....] "Who is the interpreter among us? Let him come forward!" No one dares read the message on the wet ground. [....] The gifted among them play frantically on the drums, until Nehanda is among them with promises of their future. (84-85)

As a collectivist society, the community does not know how to fight for the survival of the community without Nehanda acting as a totem. This is made evident as the community is left trying to decide whether to surrender to the British or fight a losing battle (73).

Due to the poeticism of the novel, it is difficult to concretely illustrate how the community shifts towards an individualistic society but it can be inferred by analyzing

some of the figurative aspects of the novel. One way is by demonstrating the mutual self as "dead" within the novel. For instance, the narrator states, "The loss of Nehanda would mean the loss of their link with the departed. It would mean death. It is as though they have been utterly destroyed" (73). Here, Vera's use of "death" illustrates a cultural shift rather than the community's physical death. This becomes apparent throughout the novel as Vera describes a part of the community dying (93). Again, without Nehanda acting as a totem, the community has lost a vital cultural connection and without receiving the messages of the future from the departed they cannot make collective decisions. This cultural death would destroy the community on a cultural level because surrendering to the British meant converting to Christianity and adopting British customs.

Vera does not literally illustrate this happening but on page 90 she suggests it through the humanization of bats in a cave. The narrator states:

> The guardian of the caverns had spoken with an alluring voice saying, "Leave your sight in a basket at the entrance of the cavern, and you shall be given shelter." But they have been deceived. Their sight is kept from them. Because they cannot see the horizon the future disappears from their imaginings. Forced to live in the margin of sight they devise elaborate languages to locate their young in the swarming sound-filled roof of the cavern where they wait. (90)

Although this passage is open to a multitude of interpretations, it demonstrates how the loss of Nehanda led to the cultural domination of the community when "sight" is considered a symbol for their cultural beliefs. "Sight" is applicable as a symbol for the community's cultural beliefs because the departed bring them messages of the future, also known as foresight, and these messages guide their collective action, similar to ideology and customs. In this excerpt, their "sight" can be interpreted as their societal customs and values. This understanding of "sight" demonstrates the ideological domination of the community particularly since the community becomes blind as "their

sight is kept from them." On a cultural level, this blindness illustrates the effects of the British ideological domination as the community, in order to survive, must live in a society with individualistic values for which they are not accustomed to. In this way, the community is blind because, as collectivists, they do not know how to live in a world governed by British customs and individualistic ideology.

Summary

Vera illustrates the "mutual self" through the community's collectivist actions. Nehanda acts as a totem in the novel and demonstrates how the physical domination of Nehanda led to the ideological domination of the community. Without Nehanda acting as a totem for the community, a religious and cultural part of the community "died." British ideological domination in *Nehanda* does not eradicate the community's pervious beliefs or customs; instead, British customs and ideology were assimilated into them. The ideological shift from the mutual self to the egotistic self does not happen because the community becomes individualists but because the community is forced to live in a society with individualist believes and British customs. This is an important distinction and will be useful for demonstrating Vera's ecofeminist postcolonial consciousness in the conclusion.

Chapter 5

The Care Ethic

Ecofeminists believe that an ethics based on care is attained naturally by deconstructing binaries and adopting the "mutual self" perspective (Maruyama, 178). The care ethic is important for creating a non-oppressive society because it corrects the hierarchal framework that is created through the traditional definition of ethics or justice. Jytte Nhanenge describes this further in her book, *Ecofeminism: Towards Integrating the Concerns of Women, Poor People, and Nature into Development*, stating:

> The conceptual framework upon which an ethical perspective is built has implications for environmental policy and practice. Therefore, when the conceptual framework is patriarchal, also the environmental policies and practice it produces will be oppressive. Hence, due to the inherent domination of women-Others-nature, environmental ethics needs a feminist response and analysis. (122)

This suggests that an ecofeminist care ethic will create equality for women, marginalized Others and nature.

It is difficult to provide one definition of the care ethic due to the dynamic nature of its characteristics (Nhanenge, 122); however, an understanding of it can be created by examining how the care ethic differs from the traditional ideology of ethics in an individualistic society. In her book, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters,* Karen Warren describes the six main criticisms that ecofeminists have of traditional ethics and demonstrates how an ethics of care corrects them. Three of these criticisms will create an appropriate definition of the care ethic in a way that is appropriate for the analysis of *Nehanda*. First, Karen Warren states that the traditional perspective of justice, "is based on a faulty conception of selves as atomistic

individuals, rather than as beings-in-relationships" (106). In this sense, traditional ethics is centered on the egotistic self rather than the mutual self perspective. This means that traditional ethics in individualistic societies is grounded in hierarchal relationships. This is significant because the interests of the dominant individual, or dominant social group, is valued over the interests of the wider social community. The ecofeminist construct of a care ethics challenges this through the mutual self because it creates a social justice that recognizes that the wider community is a part of the individual and the individual's own wellbeing (Nhanenge, 442).

Second, Karen Warren states that traditional ethics "preserves a mistaken or limited concept of morality as fundamentally a matter of absolute and universal rights, rules, and principles" (106-107). This suggests that traditional ethics requires a belief in a universal "objectivity" and, as a result, traditional ethics creates oppression by installing normative rules and values. This is intricately tied to the previous criticism because the dominant social group's perspective becomes the universal standard, ultimately oppressing the rest of the larger social community by "rationally" rejecting their needs. Jytte Nhanenge believes that care ethic corrects this because it focuses on the "particular and local" (Nhanenge, 122). In this way, the context of the issue and the interests of all the parties involved are central in the definition of equality rather than the theological ideology of an outsider's perspective.

Third, Karen Warren states that the traditional ethics "assumes that moral conflict resolution is always about adjudicating competing interests, rights, or rules of independent moral agents in a hierarchal, adversarial, winner-loser way" (107). This suggests that, after the dominant group has created its normative rules and values, it

imposes them onto the rest of the larger community. The larger community must adopt the dominant group's ideals of "equality" and forsake their own beliefs, which may be perceived as "irrational" due to their inferior social status (Nhanenge, 122). The ecofeminist care ethic corrects this through mutual respect and care. Jytte Nhanenge describes this further, stating:

> In care, friendship, love and respect it is crucially important to maintain both empathy and the sense of difference of needs and desires. In order to care, we do not need to assume any of the other's specific goals instead of our own. That would be to go from egoism to altruism or from hyper-separation to absorption. Instead, we include among our essential interests and desires, some of the general goals of the other's good. (442)

The care ethic is ethical because it tries to incorporate both the needs of the self and the needs of the larger community.

In *Nehanda*, Yvonne Vera uses both the deconstruction of binaries and the mutual self perspective to illustrate an ethics of care. The "Pre-colonization" section will demonstrate the care ethic by analyzing the community's perspective on the land, animals and the British. The "Colonization" section will demonstrate how British belief in traditional ethics marginalized the community and changed their relationship to the land. This section will conclude by demonstrating how British traditional ethics caused the community to become disinherited.

Pre-colonization

Vera uses deconstructive ecofeminist theory to demonstrate a communal ethics based on care in order to create a non-oppressive society. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, "Deconstruction of Binaries," Vera demonstrates the fluidity between

oppositions in order to create a cyclic worldview that eliminates hierarchies. This cyclic understanding, combined with the mutual self perspective, creates an ethics based on care in Nehanda's community. This care ethic can be illustrated by analyzing the community's perspectives and interactions with animals, the land and the British. This will be important for understanding how the British used traditional ethics and, as a result, marginalized the community and caused them to become disinherited.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, "History in *Nehanda*," the community has a culture through which they become intimately connected to the land, animals and each other. Through their caring of the land, the community receives the protection and favors of their departed ancestors (Vera, 20). It is important to note again that the community does not believe that the land can ever be "owned" by anyone (Vera, 36). This is an important distinction because it changes how the community's fight for their land is interpreted. For instance, the village women state:

> We saw the strangers as we approached the big tree. On our heads we carried large baskets full of well-prepared food that we were going to leave at the base of the tree. [....] For four days we were supposed to leave food at the foot of the tree. We were there to worship and praise our great ancestors so that we would have rain. [....] We saw the strangers sitting at the base of the tree. We had never seen such desecration. They had made a fire there and were eating the food they had prepared. [....] We were not afraid for our lives. What were our lives compared to the survival of the earth on which we stood? [....] We were afraid only of our ancestors who had been offended. How would we cleanse the soil? (19-20)

This passage demonstrates that the land was not merely a material resource but an avenue through which they have access to the departed. This demonstrates the care ethic as caring for the environment is an important aspect of their spirituality; through their connection to the environment they can become connected to their ancestors.

This illustration of the care ethic is largely due to the mutual self perspective as the land is not a possession but a piece of themselves. For instance, after Nehanda is born her father performs the naming ceremony. In this ceremony, she is being inducted into the community. Vera writes:

> He called to the ancestors that protected his lineage, and thanked them. He mixed the soil with the water in the black clay pot that had been handed to him by the women. He gave drops of water to the child to drink, and combined her with soil. May you be an offspring of the earth. [....] They say the strongest tree is one that grows from beneath a rock. He poured some of the water on to a rock. Then he made an imprint on the ground, by holding down the child's foot. May you find anchor on the earth. (17)

As Nehanda is being inducted into the community, both the living and the departed, she is simultaneously being made a part of the earth. In this sense, the land is very important to the community, not for material wealth, but for their identities and cultural ideology. This is an important distinction and will be revisited again to analyze how the community becomes disinherited.

Another way the community demonstrates the care ethic is through their hospitality and care for other people. For instance, Mr. Browning's servant Moses, formerly a member of Nehanda's community, tells Mr. Browning about his customs. Moses states, "When a stranger arrives among us we give him food and shelter. Where one is surrounded by humans, one cannot perish. I hope you shall always be surrounded by humans" (61). Moses demonstrates how the mutual self perspective creates the care ethic by creating interdependence between people. The fact that Moses is Mr. Browning's servant demonstrates how British traditional ethics and egotistic self instrumentalized and exploited Nehanda's community.

Another way the community demonstrates the care ethic is through their interaction with the environment. As previously discussed, the community is socialized to consider themselves a piece of the earth (mutual self) and they interact with the land and animals in a way that mimics communication. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, "Deconstruction of Binaries," the environment and animals become humanized and lead Kaguvi as he journeys through the forest (60). This demonstrates the care ethic as he views the environment from a position of respect and reciprocity. The environment is not something he tries to control but something he is a part of, interacts with and learns from.

Contrary to the care ethic, Vera demonstrates how the British had a lack of respect for the environment in order to demonstrate the traditional ethics and "rationality" of their individualistic perspective. For example, the British ignore and dominate their horses. The narrator states:

> The horses snort at the sudden change. They continue to sweat as they struggle up the steep slope, but now their sweat does not dry, and they begin to shiver. The men urge their horses on with soft words. One of the horses slips to its knees on the wet rock, and cries out in protest. Its rider dismounts and leads his horse on foot. Others follow his example. (71)

Vera uses this passage to suggest that the horses were trying to warn their riders right before Nehanda's community ambushed them. Instead of trying to respond respectfully to the horses' signaling, the British forcefully lead the horses into the ambush. From a British perspective it would be "irrational" to consider the horse as competent and communicative. This perspective is apparent throughout the novel as the British treat nature as something to be exploited and studied. A good example of this is Mr. Smith's fascination with insects. The narrator states:

> He took prisoner any insect that he found, and was fascinated by, and put it in one of the small bottles that he always carried with him. He avoided putting two species together, and when he ran out of bottles he might put a specimen in one of his many pockets. There the insect might be forgotten, and gradually torn to pieces. In the evening after he had had his dinner, he would sit beneath his lamp, and remove the wings and legs from his insects, examining their size and coloration. He would examine the eyes and antennae. When he cared to, he scribbled a few notes in his diary. (47)

It is difficult to determine if the use of insects in this passage may possibly be a symbol for the people of Nehanda's community but it is certain that the British consider themselves dominant over nature. Here, Mr. Smith does not consider the insects to be a part of his own life. The environment is something to exploit, whether it be for material resources or educational amusement.

Nehanda demonstrates the care ethic as the community see themselves as a part of the earth and as caretakers of the environment; they do not try to control it. This is achieved through their non-dualized understanding of the environment and their mutual self perspective. Similar to Nehanda acting as a totem, the land is another way that the community is able to be in contact with their departed ancestors and each other. Through their care of the environment the community is able to have a spiritual connection with their departed ancestors. Unlike Nehanda's community, the British have an individualistic perspective that "rationalizes" dominating and exploiting the environment. This is an important distinction and is of primary importance for demonstrating how the community becomes disinherited in the "Colonization" section.

Colonization

The British have an individualistic perspective that "rationalizes" their domination of the environment. This domination is maintained and legitimized through

the traditional ethic. As previously mentioned, the traditional ethic has six main characteristics, three of which are appropriate for analyzing *Nehanda*: the egotistic self, universal "objectivity," and the devaluing of "lesser" customs and values. The traditional ethic in *Nehanda* can be demonstrated by the British "egotistic self" perspective as described in Chapter 4, "The Mutual Self." Second, the British demonstrate the traditional ethic through the belief that only British culture is "civilized" (Vera, 46). Finally, the British devalue the community's customs by making them convert to Christianity and adopt British customs and traditions. The British demonstrate the characteristics of the traditional ethic and it causes the community to become disinherited by altering the relationship between the community and the land.

The disinheritance of Nehanda's community happens as Nehanda's people are forced to move off the land. For instance, Nehanda asks her people, "Our dead should not be left to rot on the ground, unburied. Why should we dig graves in empty ritual? In places where we have buried and worshipped, new owners have arrived and led us off with guns. How long shall we suffer this indignity?" (55). The British have taken over their lands and they are left without a meaningful place to bury their dead. This causes the community to become disinherited from the departed because the land is a meaningful part of their spiritual rituals. The people of Nehanda's community are considered to be one with the earth. When they are not able to bury the dead in their sacred lands they lose a meaningful connection with their departed ancestors because they cannot engage in their culture and religious rites.

Besides being removed from their lands, the people become disinherited through the domination of Nehanda. After Nehanda is taken prisoner, the community can no

longer communicate with the departed (84). In order for their community to survive they surrender to the British. This surrender causes them to become disinherited as they are forced to convert to Christianity. Even after they convert, they become further victimized as the British continue to attack their community and push them further off their land (83). In this way, the British domination of the land caused the community to lose their connection with the departed. The narrator states:

> The horizon looks back at them with an angry aspect. The redness of the dying sun spreads across the sky. Their prayers will not reach the departed. You who are in the ground, do not forget us. [....] And the dead are among them, but there is no one to interpret the messages which come from beyond. [....] They look to the heavens in anticipation of their relief but there is only the barrenness. (84-85)

This shows how the community can no longer communicate with the departed. In this passage the community tries to communicate with the environment but only find it barren. It is possible that this is demonstrating an ideological change that has happened in Nehanda's community. Prior to Nehanda being taken prisoner, she warns her community, "Do not submit to the unknown wisdom of the strange tongues. Those who have submitted to the spirits of the stranger have brought an abomination to the land" (55). Here, Nehanda warns the community that converting to Christianity would cause them to become disinherited. Interestingly though, Vera never depicts converting to Christianity as a complete ideological transformation. Instead, the people pretend to convert to Christianity in order to survive the wrath of the British. For instance, Moses, Mr. Browning's servant, converts to Christianity in order to get a job because he must pay the British hut-taxes (38). Kaguvi converts after he is taken prisoner in order to gain perspective on the British and find out their "secret fears" (86). Converting is more of a survival strategy than a genuine acceptance of Christianity. Vera demonstrates the

barrenness of the environment in order to suggest again that British traditions and ideology were assimilated into the community's culture without completely replacing it. This is made apparent as the community is still engaging in their communal traditions but they are having trouble interpreting the meaning behind the acts in a familiar way, hence the "barrenness." This explanation of the disinheritance makes sense and helps us understand why the community is carrying around a "dead part" of themselves (93).

Understanding colonization as a form of ideological and cultural domination illuminates *Nehanda* less as a reflection of history and more as a demonstration of the effects of two cultures clashing. British domination caused the community to become disinherited as it changed the relationship between the community and the land. The community became disinherited because it lost its access to its land. Colonization forced the community to reconcile their culture and British ideology. This reconciliation caused the community to become disinherited in one aspect since some part of the community's culture "died."

Summary

British traditional ethics in the novel caused the community's care ethic to become "irrational" and marginal in the eyes of the British. The physical domination of Nehanda led to the British dominating the environment. Their traditional ethic legitimized the domination of the environment and the domination of the community. This caused the community to become disinherited because they lost access to their sacred, communal lands. The community also becomes disinherited through ideological domination after the community is forced to convert to Christianity in order to survive.

Colonization in *Nehanda* demonstrates British ideology and customs becoming assimilated into the community. Vera illustrates the community's "disinheritance" in order to show how British domination and colonization left the community in a position where they had to reconcile their cultural beliefs with British ideology.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In *Nehanda*, Yvonne Vera transforms Zimbabwean history in order to create an ecofeminist postcolonial consciousness. She achieves this by illustrating British colonization as an era of cultural and ideological domination. This is significant because it demonstrates how British ideology became assimilated into the community's culture and caused the community to become disinherited. This disinheritance left the community stranded between their original beliefs and British ideology and customs.

Vera uses ecofeminist theory in order to demonstrate two contrasting cultures and reconciles them by creating an ecofeminist postcolonial consciousness that is useful for interpreting how the community can reclaim their inheritance. In many ways this perspective parallels Gloria Anzaldua's postcolonial perspective in, "La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness." In this article, Gloria Anzaldúa describes how colonized individuals must form a new understanding to reconcile to different cultures. She describes this transformation stating:

> The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision. [....] At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. [....] The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. [....] Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. [....] La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (363)

According to Anzaldúa, colonized individuals must reconcile the two contradicting cultures in order to create a new holistic perspective. In a similar manner, Vera creates an ecofeminist postcolonial consciousness by reconciling the community's collectivist culture and the British individualistic culture. This ecofeminist postcolonial consciousness is key for the community to reclaim its inheritance. However, this reclamation is not a material reclamation but a cultural one. This is made apparent as Nehanda makes predictions about future generations. "They have found themselves in the future which they thought they had lost. At the bank of the flowing river where new life grows they bury the dead part of themselves" (93). Here, the future generations are regrowing the parts of their culture that died during British colonization. This rebirth is necessary for reclaiming their inheritances. Nehanda predicts:

> The newly born come into the world bearing gifts. They walk and speak. They have eyes that hold memories of the future, but no one is surprised: they have received their sight back. The newly born come into the world with freed souls that are restless; they seek ways to outwit their rivals. They speak in voices that claim their inheritances. (94)

In this passage, the newly born are individuals with a postcolonial mindset. They have "received their sight back" because they have been socialized to live in a world with British customs. However, similar to Gloria Anzaldúa's description of the cultural collision, the newly born have also been socialized in a world with traditional Zimbabwean beliefs and customs. They are seeking to reclaim their inheritances because the land is still being governed by British colonial principles. In this since, Vera uses ecofeminist theory to create a postcolonial consciousness that reclaims their inheritance through the care ethic. This is significant because the redistribution of property (a

material object) is not enough to reclaim an inheritance that was taken through cultural and ideological domination.

Today, there is a land crisis in Zimbabwe as the government has started to reclaim lands that were confiscated by the British during British colonization (Cairnie,165). This has led to a new dilemma in Zimbabwe as the definitions of property and ownership are simultaneously supporting and clashing with a traditional sense of ethics. In this sense, the land itself is only one small part of a postcolonial reformation. The biggest dilemma is challenging and changing the institutional norms and ethical ideology that were created under British rule. While land redistribution is one way to offset the negative effects of colonialism, Zimbabwe can achieve true independence by changing the ideological values that govern the land. What good is land ownership if it does not change the way in which animals, the land and people are treated? In this way, Vera's ecofeminist postcolonial consciousness shows the reader that reverting colonialist domination of the land will be achieved by ending hierarchies, reclaiming a perspective of interdependence and the creation of a society based on an ethics of care.

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