Women and the Literature of Settlement and Plunder: Toward an Understanding of the Zimbabwean Land Crisis

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For nearly a decade the world has been intermittently gripped by the deepening political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe. The government-sanctioned confiscation of approximately forty-five-hundred white farms commenced in 2000 and continued for a two-year period. Few human rights violations have produced more vitriol in Britain than the sight of white families expelled from their homes, often through violence and occasionally through the murder of the patriarch. The response in this country is quite different: sure, it is shocking, but in Canada the expulsion of white farmers in a former British colony may be a poignant reminder of our own colonial history. Although white Zimbabweans form only a small portion of the regime's victims, it is largely their experience which mediates international understanding of the crisis. The status of "home" and the ways in which it is inter-implicated in race, gender, and class is really what is at stake here. What is the meaning of "home" when an estimated one-quarter of the population has fled Zimbabwe, a country ravaged by 1,000, 000 percent inflation, worrying food and fuel shortages, and daily human rights violations? What is the meaning of "home" in a country where a "Marxist" president occupies a twenty-five-bedroom mansion and endorses the burning of the huts or shanties of opposition party support-

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ers? What is the meaning of "home" for two million urban slum dwellers whose modest homes and businesses were destroyed in the Orwellian-termed "Operation *Murambatsvina*" (Operation Restore Order)? Home has deep ideological and historical meaning in Zimbabwe.

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Just as the original plunder of land for white homes in the 1890s was constituted in gendered terms, so too is the current regime's re-appropriation of land and destruction of homes. From the beginning, the establishment of white homes was connected to the arrival of white women, and black women were taught by these same women to maintain their own homes to white European standards (Kirkwood 159). Even though his original "Pioneer Column," which set out from the Cape in 1890, was comprised of men, Cecil Rhodes envisioned white women on that landscape. In a footnote in his "Last Will and Testament," readers are told that Rhodes "circl[ed] his hands about the horizon [and] said, 'Homes, more homes; that is what I work for'" (Stead 5). Margaret Strobel explains that the arrival of white women in the colonies "intensified the appropriation of indigenous land" in order to facilitate this desire for homes (2). The hut tax and a forced labour policy meant that black men left their family kraals in order to pursue work on white farms and in newly developed mines. Their authority over their wives and children diminished substantially. Given this history, black men set out to "reclaim their manhood and masculinity" when they invaded white farms (McFadden 4). Black women were sometimes active participants in this process, but they were more often victims. Farm workers and their families were forced to leave, and many women were beaten and raped. Other rural people were invited to settle on reclaimed farms, but these former commercial farms were (and are) overcrowded and under-resourced. As well, Mugabe's targeted attacks on, first, urban and, more recently, rural supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) have profoundly affected black women's (and a few white women's) ability to maintain a home. In both colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe, home is a highly contested and gendered ideological arena.

In this paper I examine four white women writers' negotiations of the problematic of land, gender, race, and home over a hundred-year period. My aim is to trace the formation and reformation of white women's claims to belong, to be at home, in Rhodesia and in Zimbabwe. While it is understood that white women played a pivotal role in the settlement of Britain's colonies, I want to push this understanding further and point to the ways in which their writing reveals the complications of white women's claims to home space in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe. White women writ-

ers continuously point to the fragility of their tenure and, more recently, find new and innovative ways of understanding home. The problematic circulates around white women's claiming or refusing the colonial bequest: a home and a farm in Africa. Both choices are exercised in the texts under consideration here. Some of the texts I examine are written in the midst of profound social and political change; others are written retrospectively and recount varied experiences of pivotal historical moments. The writers who balance the immediate and the retrospective modes have a wider historical purview and understand that black women have prior claims to their home space. Because the current crisis is largely represented through the suffering of the white family, it is essential to trace the configuration of white women and home, from the moment when the Union Jack was raised in 1890 to well past its lowering in 1980. In order to move away from neo-colonialism, it is imperative to reckon with the lingering impact of colonialism, and one of its most tenacious legacies was the formation of white homes and indigeneity.

First, I examine two texts concerned with the 1890s that expose the complex ideological space of gender, race, and settlement/plunder. Jeannie Boggie's *Experiences of Rhodesia's Pioneer Women* (1938) is a nostalgic anthology of pioneer women's life writing which tries to contain white women within a narrative of justifiable land tenure and the establishment of white homes, but the book undermines its own objectives as it exposes the precariousness of white settlement and gestures toward black women's subjectivity. Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1896) is an immediate and vociferous response to Cecil Rhodes's "Pioneer Column"'s brutal invasion of Mashonaland. Its focus is not the arrival and settlement of white women, which Schreiner clearly opposes, but a prior and portentous moment—the arrival of white men. The book proposes the reformation of white masculinities and suggests, although peripherally, that the role of black women is particularly complex and deserves attention: black women, for Schreiner, are both victims of and rebels against early white imperial incursions.

Second, I examine two writers, Cathy Buckle and Doris Lessing, who are "native" to Zimbabwe and Rhodesia, respectively. Both are concerned with the problematic of home for white women, and while Buckle chooses to stay and Lessing chooses to leave, both decisions are informed by a wider empathetic gesture than their foremothers, particularly Boggie, would countenance. Cathy Buckle, a white dispossessed farmer who decided to remain in Zimbabwe, transforms from a white Zimbabwean who highlights her own victimization, in her memoir of her

farm's takeover, *African Tears* (2001), to one who finds a new way to live as an indigenous white Zimbabwean woman, in her weekly online letter to "family and friends" (2000 to present). Her reformed role is to bear witness, from the inside, to a deepening political and economic crisis. In two of her texts written during and about the colonial period, *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *Under My Skin* (1994), Doris Lessing concentrates on the problem of white women and home, but she de-emphasizes that connection in the postcolonial period and turns her attention to the rights, responsibilities, and perils of black Zimbabweans and black Zimbabwean women in particular. This is evident in *African Laughter* (1992), "The Jewel of Africa" (2003), and in her recent Nobel Laureate speech (2007). I end with a brief consideration of Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* (1993), a retrospective narrative of the plunder of Mashonaland and Matabeleland in the 1890s from a black woman's vantage. Vera's book points to the elasticity of history: it highlights the relationship between the past and the present and reconfigures the inherited and still-current discourse surrounding land appropriation.

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Jeannie Boggie devoted her life to rationalizing and celebrating the white settlement of Rhodesia. Not only did she commission the city of Gweru's Boggie clock tower, a landmark which is also a record of white colonial accomplishments, but she also wrote a number of histories of women's particular contributions to the settlement of Rhodesia. She published facile white supremacist poetry, wrote a book about her most prized acquisitions, *A Husband and a Farm in Rhodesia* (1957), and put together two volumes dedicated to recovering the lost histories of Rhodesia's "founding mothers": *First Steps in Civilizing Rhodesia* (1940), an account of the wives of the early missionaries and hunters, and *Experiences of Rhodesia's Pioneer Women* (1938), an edited collection of reminiscences of women who participated in the settlement of Rhodesia in the 1890s. Her nostalgic account of women's participation in the land expropriations of the 1890s was reprinted twice (1950, 1954), which would seem to attest to its significance at mid-century. This was the kind of narrative that needed to circulate in order to quell whites' increasing anxiety about their future in Rhodesia. Boggie's text represents one of many attempts to correct this anxiety, in this case through a sentimental connection to women who endured much and secured white hegemony and homes in the country. Anthony Chennells explains that "settler novelists had from time to time titillated their readers with the prospect of another rising" (102). Although it is not a novel, Boggie's study of women's lives in the 1890s barely manages to suppress

the fear engendered by this "prospect." While *Experiences of Rhodesia's Pioneer Women* attempts to present a tidy and non-contradictory historical narrative of white settlement and white women's role, that attempt is repeatedly undermined.

The text's implied aim is to produce a heroic, nationalist, sanitized, white, and (although Boggie never uses the word) feminist narrative of settlement. Boggie is acutely aware that her women "were the inferior sex within the superior race" (Strobel xi) and wants to render their contributions more central to the historical narrative of righteous settlement. On her clock tower memorial she inscribes the following: "TO THE HEROIC PIONEER WOMEN, MEN AND LITTLE CHILDREN WHO OPENED UP SOUTHERN RHODESIA." Anne McClintock argues that the "opening up" of colonial space is often figured in terms of masculine heterosexual conquest: for example, the map in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* marks the contours of a woman's body (3). She further suggests that "women are figured as property belonging to men and hence as lying, by definition, outside the male contests over land, money and political power" (31). In *White Writing* J. M. Coetzee explains that white settlers produced "the literature of the empty landscape" (9), but he does not consider how this literature is inflected by gender. Boggie's memorial places women before men in the conventionally masculine narrative of conquest and thus highlights women's central role in this historical process. In *Experiences of Rhodesia's Pioneer Women* Boggie also positions women before men, at least in terms of focus, but women's primary role is to serve as helpmates to men and to establish white homes. Boggie and her contributors rehearse the masculine narrative of the empty land waiting to be conquered and occupied: it is described as "an empire peopled with nothing" (67) and "occupied only by natives" (3). However, Boggie repeatedly points out that white women experience this landscape differently: to begin, white men have to enter it first (8). Most of the narratives follow a typical pattern: women follow or accompany their husbands, cope with babies and small children, and try to maintain feminine and middle-class decorum under adverse conditions. Dressing appropriately while wielding a rifle, for example, is very important. The women are sometimes described as acting "manfully," but they never threaten the gender divide. One woman, androgynously named Billy, cross-dresses as a boy in order to accompany her husband into Rhodesia; this never poses a threat because she is later described as a charming hostess (and, perhaps, she is given some leeway because she is originally from working-class East End London). When women are able (through male sanction) to enter Rhodesia, the effect is good advertising

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for the British South Africa Company (BSAC). Dr Jameson, the administrator, "thought it would create a good impression to be able to point to the fact that English women were actually there" (65).

Still, Boggie points out that this was a dangerous landscape for white women: for example, two women left alone on an isolated farm were "attacked, and brutally murdered" (71). The perceived vulnerability of white women on isolated farms is a recurring motif throughout Rhodesia's (and, it seems, Zimbabwe's) history. In *Sunshine and Storm in Rhodesia*, F.C. Selous worries about and records the murders of white women in Mashonaland and Matabeleland. In fact, his book is dedicated to his wife, "my greatest anxiety and my greatest comfort." Jock McCulloch argues that the rape of white women by black men dominated the white imaginary during this period. Unlike their counterparts in Britain, women who were "raped" in Rhodesia were rarely doubted or their morals scrutinized. According to McCulloch, the "panics" pointed to the fragility of settlement. From Boggie's perspective these narratives of white feminine vulnerability do not undermine white settlement but reinforce it through the creation of female heroes and martyrs. However, the text's record of the deaths of white women disrupts and undermines Boggie's narrative of benign and heroic female settlement. Moreover, the text's inability to sanitize the women's sense of their sick and frail bodies problematizes settlement narratives which rely on familial tropes to secure normativity. As Anna Davin points out, the inferior bodies of the poor and women rendered British imperialism fragile. A white woman's experience of maternity in Boggie's reconstruction of the 1890s was marked by the trauma of childbirth under "primitive" conditions. One of Boggie's informants recalls, "Later on a doctor remarked to me that mortality amongst women and children was appalling. 'It was rare to get a confinement safely over,' were his tragic words" (Boggie 110). Women also had to carry infants across difficult terrain in impractical clothes and shoes. And very few women admit to breastfeeding; instead, they search for elusive tins of condensed milk. As Anna Davin points out,

> [M]any babies being "brought up by hand" would be bottle fed with the cheapest condensed milk, diluted with hot water. This was made from skimmed milk, so nutritionally it was almost useless, with less than a quarter of the fat content of breast milk, although it was often advertised with pictures of fine healthy babies. (113–14)

It was not only the threat of "native" insurrection but also the cultural construction of white middle-class femininity which made settlement and the establishment of white homes problematical.

In *Writing Women and Space*, Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose explain that the "association of indigenous women with colonized land legitimated perceptions of both women and land as objects of colonization" (10). Because of their profound though coded sense of vulnerability, Boggie's women cannot contain black women within the discourse of objectification; rather, the text gestures toward their subjectivity. There are several instances of black women staring at white women's bodies and clothes. Mrs "Sandy" Tulloch describes sleeping near a "small Kaffir kraal": "The women would not come out of the huts, but I could see them peeping out of corners with very frightened faces. I had the idea that my very long hair gave them a scare" (96). Fear is certainly something that the white and black women have in common. Tulloch merely conjectures that the women are afraid of her hair. The women were very likely frightened, but probably not of something as incidental as long hair: their land and cattle were being confiscated, their men were dying in battle, and they were, as Elizabeth Schmidt puts it, caught between two patriarchies. These instances of looking and being looked at—despite their perspectival limitations—gesture toward the acknowledgement of the subjectivity of black women, one of the central impulses behind Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda*. Although Boggie articulates, at best, a maternalistic relationship with black women, sometimes the text's informants and contributors expose the shared suffering of black and white women, the commodification of both wives and servants, and the active participation of black women in the resistance movement. While Boggie assures her readers that Rhodesia is no longer, in the words of one male settler, an "Eveless paradise" (41) but a country of settled white middle-class families, the fragility of this claim is palpable.

Boggie's home invasion is exactly what Olive Schreiner hopes to avert in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1896). Born in the Karoo, part of the Cape Province, in 1855, Schreiner spent much of her childhood in intellectual isolation, but she went to the Diamond Fields as a teenager and witnessed first hand the pecuniary nature of imperialism. In 1881, she moved to England, where she became an ardent socialist, feminist, and anti-imperialist (she counted Eleanor Marx and Havelock Ellis among her friends). She befriended Rhodes when she returned to South Africa in 1889 (the same year he received his Royal Charter to start the BSAC); at first, Schreiner was inspired by what she saw as his benevolent imperialism, but she later realized it was land-hungry imperialism. Much of

Schreiner's writing centres on land, in particular a white person's location on the African landscape. *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), her first novel, presents the farm as a dysfunctional home and thus as a microcosm of virulent imperialism but renders the black workers who service the farm marginal, almost absent. Much of this changes, however, after her conflict with Rhodes over the plunder of Mashonaland and Matabeleland, which commenced in 1890 and reached a crisis point in the mid-1890s. Schreiner wrote and published *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* in a kind of fever; it is not a retrospective narrative, like Boggie's, but very much of its particular moment. She was angered by the brutal plunder of land, cattle, and even women, and produced a political polemic directed squarely at her old friend, Cecil Rhodes. The book was dismissed as blasphemous and anti-British. The text is centred not on white women's role in the settlement of what would become Rhodesia (as one might expect from a white feminist writer, and which we find in Boggie's work) but on the relationship between land plunder and white masculinity. Furthermore, Schreiner places black women in the text's periphery and presents them as both victims and rebels. To admit white women to that already-peopled landscape would be an endorsement of Rhodes's project.

Schreiner's clear intent is to intervene in the formation of white colonizing masculinity before Boggie's white women arrive en masse and mark that land as home space. Much recent work tries to piece together imperialism and masculinity. R.W. Connell argues that "masculinities are not only shaped by the process of imperial expansion, they are active in that process and help to shape it" (245). An antecedent to contemporary masculinity theorists, Schreiner understands that there are multiple ways of performing gender, and aggressive, white supremacist masculinities can be overridden, in the case of *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, by forms of Christian pacifism. In his Introduction to *Changing Men in Southern Africa,* Robert Morrell explains that South African masculinities were transformed when Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990. White men had to circumscribe, if not renounce, their race, gender, and class privilege. Rhodes's duplicitous masculinity is Schreiner's target. In her view, Rhodes is an imperial plunderer in the guise of an imperial paternalist. Rhodes's own "Last Will and Testament" reveals this guise. While the will publicly bequeaths his (bachelor) homes in England, the Cape Colony, and Rhodesia, it also makes provisions for a scholarship fund, the now-famous Rhodes scholarship. The scholarship's original objective was to train young middle- and upper-class men in genteel imperial masculinity: applicants should demonstrate "manhood truth

courage devotion to duty sympathy for the protection of the weak kindliness unselfishness and fellowship [sic]" (Stead 36). This rhetoric disguises the violent imperial masculinity practised in Rhodesia. Connell explains this duplicity: "As hegemonic masculinity in the metropole became more subject to rationalization, violence and license were, symbolically and to some extent actually, pushed out to the colonies" (251).

Schreiner chooses to highlight this hypocrisy through a (conventionally) masculine genre: the political polemic. While the stranger's race is ambiguous, all of the central white characters in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* are men: Peter and the soldiers and their commanders. The book itself is dedicated to a white man, Lord Grey, former governor of the Cape Colony, who "represent[ed] the noblest attributes of an imperial rule." The first edition included a horrific photograph of a hanging tree, a photograph which captures duplicitous imperial masculinity: a group of white men smoke and converse civilly below the dead bodies of black rebels. The text focuses, unapologetically, on the brutalities enacted by Rhodes's troopers. On the first page, we are introduced to Peter, an English working-class teenager who becomes separated from his troop and meets a "stranger" who, the reader surmises, is Jesus Christ. Christ presents Peter with an alternative to plunder masculinity, as modeled by Rhodes, and an alternative to the muscular Christianity which was so prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, Jesus is linked to Peter's mother (72), a woman who teaches her son pacifism: "[D]on't hit a fellow smaller than yourself" (79–80). Peter is, like Rhodes, land hungry, but he has two redeeming qualities: like his mother, he "doesn't have the stomach" (79) for violence; and he is poor and, therefore, cannot fully participate in the plunder. He may desire, like Rhodes, a stately home for his mother in England, but that desire, the text makes clear, will never be fulfilled. The corrective to Rhodes's imperial masculinity is a blended gender identity: Peter eventually embraces Christ's and his mother's pacifism (a feminine attribute) but engages in activism when he frees a black prisoner and dies a martyr's death (a masculine attribute).

White women do not appear on the soon-to-be Rhodesian landscape, even though the land was being settled in 1896. Peter's exemplary mother knows her place: a quaint cottage in a quaint English village. Another woman is kept out of Schreiner's Mashonaland—the wife of a Cape Town preacher who dislikes that her husband speaks out against Rhodes's expansionist policy. The text makes clear that her opposition to her husband's mixture of religion and politics is governed by self-interest: she is worried that he will be overlooked for promotion. Schreiner problematizes white

femininity by implicating it in violent imperial projects. It is the desire for and the bequeathing of homes which engender colonial greed and violence. As such, both white women in the text are located elsewhere. Black women do make an appearance in Mashonaland—after all, it is their home space. They are presented as the real victims of the raids but also as central to the resistance (the "First *Chimurenga*" or war of liberation). Peter complains to Christ that the two black women he purchased, one for a bottle of brandy (59), stole his cartridges and joined the rebels in the bush (64–70). Elizabeth Schmidt documents Shona women's status as imperial loot: they were linked to captured cattle (39). In her discussion of Schreiner's text, Laura Chrisman concurs: "Peter's story forces on readers the awareness that racial, sexual, and labour domination of women is a central feature of colonial expansionism" (139). While the text authorizes the actions of the "freedom fighters" (223), and Peter's black women fall under this category, it also preaches a paternalistic imperialism and a missionary ethic. Peter urges his captain to tell the rebels that "we hadn't come to take their land but to teach them and love them" (224). Schreiner argues against settlement in favour of a form of transient proselytizing; this is simply naïve. Moreover, she proposes the possibility of a kind of blood brotherhood: when Peter dies in the act of releasing his "brother," a black prisoner, the narrator explains that "a black man's blood and a white man's blood were mingled" (259). There is another kind of blood mingling in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, but it is introduced and quickly dropped: one of Peter's escaped women is clearly pregnant, and he supposes that her companion is also pregnant—both with his children. Still, we don't know what happens to these women and their babies; readers are only given a teasing glimpse of their lives. Moreover, with its focus on the men, the text does not open up the possibility of a "blood sisterhood," a problem that Schreiner begins to explore in *Woman and Labour* (1911), the last book she published before she died in 1920.

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Cathy Buckle is a former white farmer who has become a well-known and trusted writer in less than a decade. Unlike Boggie and Schreiner, Buckle is "native" to Zimbabwe: she was born and raised there, by a father who was a human rights lawyer and a mother who was a state school teacher and writer. Trained as a social worker, Buckle was the only white person in her graduating class. Together with her husband, she purchased Stow Farm in 1990; it was not a colonial family inheritance. Moreover, she has actively raised her son to be non-racist and, when she had the farm, strived to produce an equitable environment for her farm workers. It was

the six-month invasion of her farm in 2000 that spurred Buckle to write, as she (2002) puts it, "non-fiction" (20). She sent email updates to family and friends across the world; they, in turn, widely distributed her weekly messages. Soon after, Buckle decided to write up the harrowing experience in a more coherent narrative form, *African Tears* (2001). A year later, she published *Beyond Tears* (2002), a wider and slightly less personal account of what happened after she left the farm. Since 2000, she has faithfully posted (with few interruptions) her weekly letter on her website (cathybuckle.com). Buckle enters the conversation about white femininity and home, but there is also a marked shift in her understanding of the gendered and racial dimensions of the land contests. Her writing moves from untheorized claims about the righteousness of white feminine settlement to an understanding of the historical complexity of her place on the Zimbabwean landscape. From this understanding Buckle learns to practise responsible, humble white feminine indigeneity. Moreover, her writing shifts from a position of impulsiveness to a mixture of the necessities of the moment and a wider historical framework.

In *African Tears,* Buckle resuscitates Schreiner's concern with the function of masculinity in land crises, but not from a reformist vantage. Similar to Schreiner, Buckle writes her book in order to record the atrocities taking place on her farm in Zimbabwe and to compel the world to take notice and to take action. The difference is that Schreiner keeps herself (and other white women) at a remove; white masculinity is her particular concern. Buckle utilizes familiar constructions of black and white masculinities in order to articulate a familiar motif: the vulnerability of a white woman on an isolated farm in Zimbabwe. The land is repeatedly described as "raped" by the invaders, who mostly comprise black men. This is a significant trope because it provides an opportunity for Buckle to imagine how blacks, and especially black women, experienced the land seizures of the 1890s and the 1930s. We know from *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* that black women were often vulnerable to rape by white men; Peter himself is a perpetrator. Regrettably, Buckle does not seize the opportunity. Instead, the perceived sexual threat of black men to white women lurks just beneath the surface of her text. There is no historical understanding of the colonial emasculation of black men and the complex historical relationship between black men and white women. Buckle is equally preoccupied with the presence (and absence) of white men. In her Preface, she highlights her single-handed, if reluctant, running of the farm, and then quickly shifts focus to her husband: "I cannot describe how he [her husband, Ian] felt when he could not protect his land, his home or even his wife and son" (nn).

This recalls Selous's anxiety about his wife's safety—in the 1890s. As well, farmers and their ancestors are described as "fathers" and "grandfathers" and are said to "have balls" (162). Even though *African Tears* is ostensibly about a white woman's experience of losing her farm, it relies on familiar and unsettling tropes of white and black masculinity.

Buckle invokes familiar tropes of white femininity, too. Her rendering of the relationship between white and black women is drawn from the same ideological space as Boggie. In her encounters with black women, Buckle characterizes herself as maternalistic and patronizing, as well as victimized. Although the text offers no historical analysis of the present conflict, it still manages to replay the dynamic of white and black femininity found in Boggie's text. It is clearly a historical memory that Buckle cannot shake. Ironically, Buckle often employs sarcasm in her references to black Zimbabweans' understanding of the past: "We were after all only the white racist commercial farmers who had stolen all of this land from the ancestors of true Zimbabweans" (220). However, as Alison Goebel points out, "Zimbabwe's colonial past was marked by profound land inequities, with white settlers controlling the greater part of the most fertile land" (7). It is this history that Buckle refuses to reckon with. She is particularly patronizing toward a black woman whose apparently flawed historical perspective on the "Pioneer Column" in 1890 is recorded in "The Farmer" (a questionable source): "'They drove in their Land Rovers with a full tank of petrol until the petrol ran out. When they ran out of petrol they put a peg in the ground'" (30). Buckle responds, "I was certainly not around in 1890 so cannot comment on how land was originally given to white settlers, but am pretty sure that the Land Rover wasn't invented for another 40 or 50 years" (30). Buckle abdicates responsibility for understanding the complex history of land in Zimbabwe, and she even puts emphasis on the land been "given" rather than "taken." Moreover, she disturbingly belittles the woman's lack of historical knowledge, mostly about the invention of the Land Rover!

In *African Tears,* Buckle assumes a position of superiority over her shop assistant, Jane. Theirs is a maternalistic relationship, similar to the kinds of relationships Boggie delineates. While Buckle demonstrates genuine concern when Jane is disfigured by "war veterans," she tries (unsuccessfully) to force a reticent Jane to tell her what happened. Buckle is participating in a tradition of settler women's "do-gooding," as described by Deborah Kirkwood: "A black woman interviewed in 1980 paid unreserved tribute to the work of the clubs [Women's Institute Homecraft Club]; but she suggested that there was an element of 'maternalism' among

some of the white organizers which gave offence" (160). These clubs were focused on the education of black women in proper hygiene, child care, and housekeeping skills. The very recent history of the clubs—they were interrupted during the liberation war and resumed, in new forms, after Independence—would surely be known to Buckle and should serve as one poignant reminder of black women's troubled relationships with white women. Buckle assumes that she knows what is best for Jane: talk therapy, it seems. Unlike Schreiner's black women, who fight alongside their men, Jane is attacked by black men while securing her white employer's hegemony. Hers is a troubled position that is unacknowledged by Buckle. Goebel explains that the "large questions of race, class, capitalism, and post-coloniality … paint the broad strokes of the land question in Zimbabwe," and then goes on to ask, "How do we fill in the fine brushwork of women and gender between these broad strokes?" (30). In *African Tears,* Buckle does not meet black women on an equal footing, largely because she fails to comprehend the racialized and gendered history that has produced the current land crisis as well as the fraught history of relationships between white and black women.

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Buckle's ahistoricism means that she sees white farmers as victims: they are engaged in a "struggle" (her word) to secure their human rights, mostly land title. Even the invocation of the right to title hearkens to past colonial injustices regarding land and race. Alison Goebel explains that the Land Apportionment Act (1930) "designated [white land] as private property, with title deeds and inheritance laws" (7), but "the colonial government preferred to construct African landholding as 'communal'" (8). While the illegality and brutality of Mugabe's land seizures is indisputable, Boggie's depiction of white farmers as solely victims is troubling. It is Buckle's depiction of herself as a "poor white" which moves the text toward a more innovative understanding of white femininity and home. Buckle remarks that her bank balance is dwindling (88) and plans to rent a one-acre plot in town (204). She resembles a *bywoner*, a category of poor white South African who in the early twentieth century was forced, for economic reasons, to leave the family farm for the growing urban centres. The situation in early twentieth-century South Africa, however, was unique: poor whites were recruited and ultimately protected by the Nationalist Party, the party responsible for Apartheid. While the nuances of each period and country are unique, both South Africa in the early twentieth century and Zimbabwe in the early twenty-first century were undergoing intense change, and this required a readjustment of outlook and location. There is a fascinating moment in *African Tears*, just prior to

Buckle's departure, when dressed "in [her] filthy, ragged shorts, stretched t-shirt and black tackies with holes in the toes," she is approached by a well-dressed black woman "in a very fancy car" who asks her what is wrong (227). At first, the woman refuses to believe that the farm is on the verge of bankruptcy, but the writer's "appearance put paid to her belief" (228). This is a significant departure from the "appearance" of white women in Boggie's text: Buckle understands that her appearance is not intimidating but pathetic and inferior to the black woman and her (Buckle speculates) government-issued car. Poor whites have a long history in southern Africa and have made a reappearance since the eradication of Apartheid in South Africa and the commencement of the land seizures in Zimbabwe. Poor whites challenge racial borders and underscore the potential for solidarity and community across the colour bar.

Despite the text's blind spots, the final image is of the writer in reduced circumstances but staying on in Zimbabwe. While Mugabe repeatedly makes contradictory statements and has clearly violated the human rights of white Zimbabweans, he seems to envision such a scenario when he says, "'Our entire community is angry and that is why we now have war veterans seizing land and this will require a real transformation on [whites'] parts'" (quoted in Buckle 58). *Beyond Tears*, published a year after *African Tears*, is subtitled *Zimbabwe's Tragedy* and offers a wider view of the situation. Buckle records an exchange with Jane, her former store manager:

> After we had caught up on each others' news I went and got a copy of *African Tears* to give to Jane and inside I wrote: "This is our story, we were together."
>
> "It is you," Jane kept repeating as she stroked the front cover again and again.
>
> "It's us, Jane," I answered. "It is all of us, our story." (77)

Jane, however, is right: *African Tears* is, in the end, Buckle's "tragedy." While Buckle acknowledges that "the vast majority of ordinary black Zimbabweans did not want to tell their stories" (163), she strives to expand the focus from the individual to the community. Her most significant transformation may be measured in her post-farm weekly emails, which do not focus on the plight of "poor" whites but cover a range of issues: conservation, corruption, starvation, and gender issues. Buckle increasingly uses plural pronouns to describe the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. In her 23 March 2008 posting, less than a week before the last election, Buckle writes, "We must vote for ourselves, our children and our physical survival. The time is now, the power is in our hands." The challenges of

mothering (and not just her own) are also a central focus: "It is no comfort whatsoever to us mums who can't find enough food for our families" (13 April 2008). Moreover, Buckle's weekly postings are written in the immediacy of the moment and demonstrate an informed historical perspective. The discourse of land is no longer simply about the denial of the legality of title. Cathy Buckle reinvents the relationship between white femininity and home in Zimbabwe, and her reformed role is to bear witness, from the inside, to a deepening political and economic crisis.

Doris Lessing's roots in Zimbabwe clearly inform her commitment to the processes of social and political change there. There is a discernible shift in her study of land, white femininity, and home—from her writing which offers a critical engagement with white women's claims to indigeneity and home space in the 1930s and 1940s ("then") to her reflections on the current crisis which move away from the long-standing association between land and white femininity ("now").[1] In *The Grass is Singing* and *Under My Skin*, Lessing highlights and ultimately criticizes the ideological relationship between land expropriation and white femininity—that violent land conquest produces (purportedly) peaceful white middle-class domesticity. Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* gestures toward this problematic, but Lessing's primary targets in her study of the colonial period are white women. Women are expected to shoulder the responsibility to produce home space, but Lessing's two texts repeatedly undermine this responsibility. Her writing militates against Boggie's desire to extol the so-called pioneer mothers. In her writing situated in the post-Independence period—including *African Laughter* and her recent comments on the Zimbabwean crisis—Lessing recognizes that land has meaning that is not only inscribed by the presence of white women. Unlike Buckle, who depicts herself as a Zimbabwean, Lessing withdraws from her old home space and, like Schreiner, bears witness to a deepening crisis from a distance.

Lessing's reflections on white women and land began in 1950 with the publication of her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*. The novel traces a poor white woman's mental and physical deterioration (even degeneration). Mary Turner is increasingly unable to perform her role as a respectable white middle-class housewife and her body is a record of this inability: her skin and hair become coarsened by the sun, and she begins to wear

1 "Then" and "Now" is a formulation Lessing uses throughout *African Laughter* in order to accent the divergence of the present from the past and, somewhat contradictorily, in order to suggest the continuity between the past and the present.

"African" clothes and jewellery. The degeneration of Mary's body is a riff on Boggie's women's bodies: whereas Lessing uses it to point to the fragility of white settlement, Boggie and her contributors are unable to suppress the anxiety which frail white women's bodies produce. In effect, the Turners' failure to produce a white middle-class home in the bush facilitates the farm takeovers which are anticipated at the end of the text. Mary deteriorates because she cannot make a middle-class home. It is curious that some critics, including Eva Hunter, can describe the novel as a study of "the tedious monotony of life in the country for a middle-class woman" (143). While the farm clearly did not thrive before Mary's arrival, its fragile economic and social balance begins to deteriorate rapidly after her arrival. This is because Dick is now expected to "rape" the land in order to produce a middle-class home. He fails because he refuses to make the land suffer in order to satisfy social expectations. Mary promises to be a much more efficient farmer than her husband because she is willing to control both the land and the black male bodies that work it, but this is clearly a violation of her role as a white woman. An extension of this violation occurs when she establishes a "human relationship" with one of her servants, the central social taboo in Rhodesia.

This is a substantial failure: typically, white women signal permanence.

The Turners fail to make a home in this space and thus reveal, to Moses and other black people, a flaw in the white community's armour. Their failure facilitates revolt. While white femininity is largely linked to the impetus behind the conquest of the land, the land itself—at least in *The Grass is Singing*—is linked to a black man, Moses, who is repeatedly equated with the bush. Mary feels that "the hostile bush" (198) hates the house, the sign of white domestic settlement: "[The house] would be killed by the bush, which had always hated it" (242). At the end of the novel, when Moses finally kills Mary, the narrator explains, "And then the bush avenged itself: that was her last thought" (254). The house is supposed to be her contribution to the space of the farm, but Mary fails. This is a substantial failure: typically, white women signal permanence. Their permanence poses a significant threat to black nationalism:

> The late Tom Mboya is said to have remarked, *a propos* Kenya, that the white women were the most dangerous enemies of African nationalism, not only because their sympathy and co-operation with African women blunted the cutting edge of resentment against white domination, but because of their tenacious attachment to the homes they had created. (Kirkwood 160)

Mary's detestation of black women undermines Mboya's claim. However, Moses understands Mary's significance: after all, he kills her, not Dick. It is understood that when she is killed white hegemony will start to unravel. At the end of the novel, there is a clear anticipation of blacks laying claim to the land that was stolen from them in the 1890s, an expropriation which intensified with the arrival of white women. *The Grass is Singing* begins to narrate a shift in emphasis, from land and white femininity to land and black revolution. The battle, however, is squarely located between white women and black men. The novel invokes a postcolonial trajectory that marginalizes black women, a trajectory that Vera interrupts in *Nehanda*.

In *Under My Skin* (1994), her autobiography to 1949, Lessing continues to explore the concept of home but offers an alternative to Mary Turner, the women in Boggie's text, and even Cathy Buckle in *African Tears*—all of them (variously) feminine apologists for white settlement. By its very nature, autobiography is retrospective and inventive. Lessing rewrites the past in order to shift focus away from white women's compliance in land expropriations. In *Under My Skin,* Lessing explains that her parents were drawn to Rhodesia by the Empire Exhibitions. Even though these Exhibitions invited all Britons, including women and the poor, to participate in empire-building (56; McClintock 61), Lessing herself opted out. Victoria Middleton suggests that Lessing "explores the predicament of the white woman on the African landscape" (137). In *Under My Skin,* that predicament is understood through defiance, as Lessing presents her young self "at home" in the bush, not the farm, and opposed to white supremacy. The young Lessing not only marks her difference from her mother but also from the fictional Mary Turner. Lessing's defiance is registered in her sexual and political independence, her growing discomfort with white farm culture, and her final decision to leave. Lessing defies the rules governing white female behaviour, so clearly delineated in Boggie's text and in *The Grass is Singing*. Even though her own mother warns her about the sexual dangers of the bush, Lessing often locates herself there. The bush is where she admires her "delicious body" (187) and explores her sexuality: "Twice I enticed him into the bush" (184). At one point she describes wandering the bush "in an amorous trance" (193). Lessing counters much of the previous discourse regarding women and the bush as she transforms the bush-body interface from a sexual threat to a sexual turn-on. For her and, by implication, other women, Lessing claims a space of erotic pleasure from beneath a construction of social space which only ever envisions sexual assault for white women. Furthermore, even though the white farm is supposedly the site of "civilization" and home, Lessing often absents herself. Lessing's

ideas—about female sexuality and white settlement—are at odds with the white farm culture she delineates in *The Grass is Singing*, *Under My Skin*, and even her contemporary travelogue, *African Laughter*.

Because of her political writing, Lessing was declared a "Prohibited Immigrant" by the Rhodesian regime in the 1950s, and she was unable to return until after Independence in 1980. Lessing places land and farming at the centre of her four trips to Zimbabwe in *African Laughter*. Unlike her travelogue of the 1950s, *Going Home*, her travelogue of the 1990s refuses to stake an emotional land claim: England, not Zimbabwe, is home. Rather than focus on white femininity and land issues, a broader understanding of the constitution of home is at the forefront of Lessing's inquiry. Indeed, the text is framed by this consideration: the epigraph is an account of Rhodes's "slicing" up of the land, and the final section reflects on the fledgling, and largely unsuccessful, resettlement programmes of the 1990s. Lessing meets with white and black farmers, commercial and subsistence, in order to make sense of the land issue in postcolonial Zimbabwe. She identifies many white farmers as "land pirates" (94) but also recognizes genuine attempts to change and fit in. Lessing tells the story of a white farmer who applies to join ZANU-PF, Mugabe's party. During the interview he declares, "'I'm never going to leave this country. If you burned my house down around my ears and told me to live in a mud hut I'd stay'" (418). Lessing clearly admires this (prophetic) attempt to collapse the binary between home and bush, to fit in, but it is not the trajectory of her life. The memory of her family's farm resurfaces throughout the text. In 1982, her brother tells her that he visited the site but advises Lessing against doing the same as the farm and the bush have changed dramatically (35–36). In 1988, Lessing does gather courage to visit the old farm. In her recollection of that visit, she retells the violent history of settlement, regrets that the bush has changed, but importantly remarks that the farm is now occupied (rightly so) by an extended black family (301–19). Later, in 1989, she once again approaches the farm, notices a "Trespassers will be Prosecuted" sign, and leaves: "Quite right too" (426). She is no longer "at home."

In the colonial period, the relationship between land expropriation and white femininity was central. However, not all white women could (or even wanted to) establish what was required of them: respectable white middle-class domesticity. Lessing depicts herself as an outsider to this narrative, as refusing white middle-class domesticity (demonstrated most radically by her departure for England as a single mother of one, and leaving two of her children behind). In her writing, Lessing suggests that the flaws and

fissures in white domesticity (or settlement)—including non-conforming women and poor whites—will help to facilitate the dissolution of white power and land tenure in the country. Lessing demonstrates an acute sense of the impetus behind the land grabs of the 1890s, and the establishment of white homes, and understands that the concept of home is evolving, for black and white Zimbabweans, but she no longer claims nativity for herself. In her comments on the early 2000s farm takeovers Lessing does not mediate the land crisis through white femininity. At the Edinburgh Festival in 2002, Lessing placed emphasis on black Zimbabweans' experiences, with whites participating when invited ("Zimbabwe-raised Novelist"). A year later, in "The Jewel of Africa," she notes that some white farmers made "attempts to change," but black Zimbabweans find it difficult to forget their "brutal" history. The future which Lessing imagines in *The Grass is Singing* has arrived: just before she is murdered Mary wants to make reparations, to apologize, but it is too late. It is deeply significant that she is murdered on the veranda of the farmhouse.

In her recent Nobel Prize speech (2007), Doris Lessing tells a story about a poor young black mother reading a passage from *Anna Karenina*. This woman is thrilled to see parallels between her own life in twenty-first-century southern Africa and Anna's in nineteenth-century Russia. Like the protagonist of Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda*, she is able to "travel in both directions of time" (Vera 3) and cross vast expanses of land. Lessing gives this young woman an intellectual and emotional depth that is rarely granted to black women in Africa and closes her speech with a radical prognosis: "I think it is that girl and the women who were talking about books and an education when they had not eaten for three days, that may yet define us." Yvonne Vera, often described as the most important writer of Zimbabwe's post-Independence period, takes on the task of writing up the lives of such women and girls. One such woman is Nehanda, a spirit medium born in 1863 and executed by the British in 1898 for the murder of a Native Commissioner. Published one hundred years after the tumultuous events of the 1890s and in the midst of the failure of Independence, Vera's *Nehanda* is a retrospective narrative which is also situated in the present. The text demonstrates an acute understanding of the ways in which "the past" has been used to oppress women in "the present." Ballard-Reisch explains that "[t]raditionalists … have defined emancipation for women as the freedom to return only to those pre-colonial African traditions that sustain male dominance" (68). Vera tries to overwrite this form of oppression by producing, in her words, a "spiritual history" (quoted in Bryce 220). In *Nehanda,* Vera engages the familiar conventions of land

appropriation and gender but takes liberty with colonial history and upsets those conventions. The ultimate effect is a broader sense of the temporal and spatial dimensions of home for black women.

Nehanda presents readers with the familiar gendered narrative of land plunder. Mr Browning, the Native Commissioner, awaits the arrival of his wife, as does his servant Moses, but with trepidation. Yet it is the different spatial perspectives on land held by white and black men which capture Browning's attention. He explains to his assistant, "'Smith, do you know the difference between us and the natives? The difference is that we know where we are and the native does not.… We have drawn maps, and know how to locate ourselves on the globe. The native only knows where *he* is standing'" (52, emphasis added). Browning's use of the pronoun "he" reinforces the patriarchal nature of the struggle over land. Similarly, Boggie, Schreiner, and even Buckle depict this history as a battle between two patriarchies. As McClintock has shown, however, in the iconography of the nineteenth century black men are often represented as feminine and the land as feminine—waiting to be conquered and filled. The text reproduces and manipulates these conventions. For instance, Kaguvi, Nehanda's male counterpart, is an ineffectual and weak leader: he quickly surrenders to the British (100) and converts to Christianity (108). The text's figuration of black women undermines the iconography typically used to describe them. Browning's maps, we learn, are just as conceptual as the bodies that are used to represent land. The land is indeed feminized throughout the text: "Rivers and trees cover her palms" (1). However, unlike the convention, Nehanda's body does not await conquest and penetration; it is not a map that facilitates plunder. Moreover, Nehanda and her friend Vatete assume far more active roles than typically ascribed to black women. For a start, women bear witness to the confiscation and desecration of their ancestral lands. Not only does this reconfigure land as a possession of black women, but it is an important corrective to the perspectival limitations of Boggie's text. Vera clearly indicates that black women see. Black women are not just observers, they are actors, too, a point that Schreiner only partially makes in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*. Unlike Kaguvi, Nehanda engages in spiritual reflection and evades capture long after Kaguvi surrenders. Nehanda travels through the vast forest and the vast expanses of time. In the end she refuses to be converted (114) and approaches her impending execution with "joyful celebration" (118). In Vera's revisionist history, Nehanda is heroic and brave but also the repository of *new* cultural values about black women, land, and home.

Written in the historical aftermath of the original land plunder, thirteen years after Independence, and on the eve of the white farm takeovers, *Nehanda* inscribes a black feminist narrative of land and femininity. Vera's book reminds us that land and home have long-standing associations with gender, but also that black women do not have to be circumscribed by these associations. The land plunders—of the 1890s and the early 2000s—did not finally and forever subjugate and silence black women. The subaltern can, in Vera's view, speak. Nehanda's dying words, "My bones will rise again," highlight the tenacity of black Zimbabwean women's presence across time and space. In this paper, I have explored white women's complex relationship to land and home space in Zimbabwe in order to understand and reckon with one of the most tenacious legacies of colonialism: the establishment of white homes. The four white women writers under consideration here engage with this legacy at different historical junctures and with a range of positions on the rectitude of the colonial project. Boggie strives to contain white women within the narrative of justifiable land tenure, but fails. Schreiner is acutely aware that white women pose a significant threat to black autonomy, places her focus on white and black men, and offers a partial and teasing narrative of black women's role in the risings of the 1890s. It is Buckle and Lessing, however, who are able to re-imagine the place of the white woman on the Zimbabwean landscape in innovative ways. Lessing is an outside observer who, ultimately, offers service to Africa and minimizes her own significance as a white woman. Buckle is also an observer, from the inside, and the narrative of humble white feminine indigeneity which she invokes is slowly unfolding. At the time of her death in 2005, Yvonne Vera was working on a new novel, *Obedience*, which concentrates on the events surrounding the 2002 elections in Zimbabwe. Her partial, incomplete text is a poignant figure for the narrative of land and gender in Zimbabwe. I began this paper by gesturing toward the parallels between Zimbabwe and Canada. These parallels are evident in the hundreds of unresolved native land claims in this country, and also, I suggest, by the fact that Yvonne Vera wrote *Nehanda*, her first novel, while she was a doctoral student at York University in Toronto and dictated *Obedience*, her last novel, to her husband while she lay dying in Toronto twelve years later.

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