CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A number of works of African literature are about nationhood. The reason for this, as critic Simon Gikandi (1991:13)[1] has observed, is that the development of African literature runs parallel to that of nation formation in the continent. In narrating the nation, the African writer, and particularly the African novelist, wears a number of hats: he or she sees himself or herself, like Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, as a teacher or, like Ousmane Sembene, as an historian or a griot who chronicles and 'interpret(s) the socio-historical and cultural heritage of his community' (Françoise Pfaff, 1993:15) in an attempt to raise its national consciousness. Sometimes the African novelist writes from the perspective of a witness who tells about neocolonial practices that threaten nation formation, and, sometimes, from that of an exile who, in the words of Timothy Brennan (1989:26), 'proclaims his identity with a country whose artificiality and exclusiveness has driven him into a kind of exile - a simultaneous recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it'. And in some instances he or she acts simply as a propagandist. Whatever the standpoint from which a national narrative is written, it is definitely worth examining the representation of the nation it provides, as this will enhance the significance of the text.

The purpose of this thesis is to consider representations of the Zimbabwean nation as revealed in a selected sample of texts by Zimbabwean writers. This chapter sets the scene of this study by exploring the possibility of reading African narratives of the nation in the light of current theories of nation in postcolonial cultural studies. It begins by presenting

[1] For the purpose of notation, an annotated Harvard system has been adopted.

an overview of a number of these theories, in order to demonstrate the need to shift the focus from an analysis of nationalism in Zimbabwean literature, as has been done in a number of studies (see, for example, Morrison and Ngara, 1989; O'Brien, 1994; Sibanyoni, 1995; and Taitz, 1996), to a study of representations of the Zimbabwean nation as cultural construct. The overview is also warranted by the need to define the uses of the term 'nation' in this project and highlight the limitations of the kind of criticism that has read African literature as either celebrating or undermining this notion. Further, the chapter engages the view that there exists no national (as opposed to nationalist) literature in Africa. It argues that such a view overlooks the common concern among Zimbabwean writers, of all races, genders and classes, with issues of difference and identity in their shared cultural space. The chapter then justifies the choice of approach, authors and texts.

Until quite recently the idea of the nation as a historically and geographically determined reality was a well-established view among political theorists. Ernest Renan (in Homi K. Bhabha, 1990:19) expresses this traditional view when he states that the idea of the nation lies in 'the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories' and 'the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage one has received in an undivided form'. A common past implies not only the sharing of a common culture and history but also, in most cases, the same geography. In the Third World context, Frantz Fanon's critique of bourgeois nationalism, articulated in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968), rests on this traditional and, some say, conservative, concept of nation.

Fanon's perceived failure to question nationhood in the colonial states of Africa which rose to the status of independent nation-states has amazed some of his liberal critics.

Christopher Miller (1992:73), for example, is surprised that Fanon applies the term 'nation' to 'ethnic entities' that are far from being nations. Explaining Miller's position on this point, Neil Lazarus (1993:73) observes that Fanon 'takes for granted the unforgoability even the world-historical "appropriateness" of what has been imposed upon Africa by the colonial powers'. According to Lazarus (1993:73), by doing so, Fanon privileges the nation not only as the "obvious" but also as the decisive unit of anti-imperialist struggle'. At the same time, both Miller and Lazarus seem to suggest that, in using this discursive framework for his critique of colonialism, Fanon unwittingly locates himself plainly in the very conservative and colonial terrain he seeks to reject.

To be sure, Fanon's re-appropriation of the concept of nation serves his purpose, for it provides him with a base from which he can launch his critique of colonialism and neocolonialism. He purposefully remains within the terms of the colonizer's model of the colonial nation for he believes that colonial nations can rise to the status of new nations if precolonial national culture is taken into consideration. In Fanon's (1968b:169) view, precolonial culture helps 'rehabilitate [a] nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture'. This is why he sees 'literature of combat' as playing a vital role in helping foster national consciousness by drawing on past culture. As he puts it, '[literature of combat] moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons...' (Fanon, 1968b:193).

It is a dimension of Fanon's influence that his ideas about the nation resonate in the works of a number of Third World writers, such as Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Yambo Ouologouem to name but a few, whose texts construct Africa as a space of

struggle against colonialism and its aftermath, neo-colonialism. Armah, in his novel *Two Thousand Seasons* (1978), idealizes this precolonial culture, which he refers to as the 'way', whose loss he situates at the arrival of first the Arab, then the European 'invaders' and whose recovery, through armed struggle and resistance to foreign cultural imperialism, he sees as a necessary condition for the emancipation of the African nations. The same valorization of national culture as an antidote to colonialism can be seen in resistance narratives by Zimbabwean writers. One of the chapters of this thesis (see Chapter Three) focuses on a representative narrative of the liberation war. Drawing upon Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), it pays attention to the way this novel (see discussion of Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda*) conveys a notion of the nation that is, in the words used by Svetlana Boym (1995:152) in a different context, 'not merely a specific geographic entity, but a state of the soul, a world-view, a spiritual continent'.

As has been pointed out by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1991:353), this type of ideological African literary text that celebrates the nation has been followed in the post-independence period by texts that 'reject not only the Western *imperium* but also the nationalist project of the postcolonial bourgeoisie'. Nonetheless, the concept of nation underpinning all these various texts is the traditional one handed in by the Enlightenment. Accordingly, discussions of images of the nation in such texts have largely been conducted with this notion in mind.

The emergence of new nation-states in the Third World, their vulnerability to secessions and, more recently, the disintegration of some countries in the former Eastern Bloc have however discredited this traditional idea of nation. Benedict Anderson's seminal work,

Imagined Communities (1983), represents perhaps the boldest attempt to reconsider this concept of the nation. Anderson's thesis (1983:19) is that the idea of nation should be associated 'not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural system that preceded it, out of which - as well as against which - it came into being'. He sees its development as resulting from 'a half-fortuitous, but explosive interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity' (46). Of significance to the argument of this study is Anderson's view that print media, notably the newspaper and the novel, have been instrumental in shaping the idea of the nation and still perpetuate the myth of the nation by constituting readers as subjects who regard themselves as members of a national community.

The nation as imagined community, Anderson argues, affirms its existence through a number of traditions and symbols. In a defence of this argument, Eric Hobsbawm (1983:7) suggests that it is symbols such as flags, anthems, ceremonials, monuments, mottoes and the traditions associated with them, as well as nationalism, which constitute our referents of the idea of nation. In a similar vein, Ernest Gellner (1983:55) states that 'it is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round', adding that 'the cultures it claims to defend and revive are often its own invention, or are modified out of all recognition'. Also relaying this view, Timothy Brennan (1989:4) observes that, 'nations are mental projections, or polyglot renderings of a single epic creation that is in the world rather than about it; that nation-forming is of the present, rather than the past ...'. Not so, says Anthony D. Smith. In a clear dismissal of Hobsbawm's view that the invention of traditions legitimizes the nation, Smith remarks that 'there is more to the formations of nations than

nationalist fabrication, and "invention" must be understood in its other sense of a novel recombination of existing elements' (Smith, 1992:72). In an implicit criticism of Benedict Anderson's view of the role of print capitalism in spreading the idea of the nation, Smith asserts that such a view does not account for important elements in the pre-modern era, including pre-existent ethnic ties and the existence of nations even in Antiquity, which contributed to the construction of modern nations.

Of relevance to the African context is Partha Chatterjee's (1993) similar criticism of Anderson. According to Chatterjee (1993:7), the 'specifities of the colonial situation do not allow a simple transposition of European patterns of development'. Indeed, in Africa the illiterate masses do not have access to the print media, which are a luxury in many parts of the continent, and they are not even fluent in the colonial language which is the medium of most of those print media. In terms of Anderson's argument, this means that an important section of the nation is not served with the ideological discourse that he sees as vital for spreading and reinforcing nationalism. Because of the lack of adequate printing infrastructure and the high cost of books, there is even less access to the novel, even for literate members of the community. Whether to write in an indigenous language (as Ngugi wa Thiong'o has argued) for an insignificant public, or write for a largely foreign public whose nationalism does not need to be reinforced by narratives from another nation (as writers like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have done), are questions that give a sense of how difficult it is for African writers to promote nationalism in a medium that is foreign to their nations.

Viewed in this context, the debate about the language issue in African literature becomes, in fact, a debate about whether nation formation in Africa runs the risk of coming to a standstill if that literature does not achieve its goal of moulding the 'national' community. Ngugi in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) has a point when, following Fanon, he expresses concern about the use of a foreign language to carry national cultures and draws attention to the fact that a foreign language can serve the colonizing purposes of an oppressor nation. Ngugi's argument carries over from the literary and cultural domain to the political field as is particularly evident in his reference to Africa and the West as oppressed and oppressor, respectively. Perhaps more resolutely than other African writers, Ngugi contests a universalistic discourse which considers local (African) writers as agents of a universal (Western) culture.

The analysis of the concept of nation presented above reveals that the term 'nation' falls prey to a contradiction of its own. Samir Amin (1997:8) captures this tension, inherent in the concept of nation itself, when he observes that 'it opposes universality - of the human species, of its destiny, of its societal forms - to the particularity of the communities that make up humanity'. This ambivalence between '*societas*' and '*universitas*' is what Homi Bhabha (1990:3) characterizes, after Tom Nairn, as the 'Janus-faced discourse of the nation'. The emphasis on the notion of a global or cosmopolitan nation that has emerged in recent works on nationalism bestows on the concept of nation the universalistic sense Amin speaks about. Such a notion is framed in Julia Kristeva (1991, 1993) as a condition for displacing the kind of petty nationalism that she has observed in France. In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), she alerts her reader to the fact that the foreigner, far from being the Other, is someone like us for we are also strangers to others. Such a situation, she argues,

is a crucial reminder of the limits of nationalism. The title of her book *Nations Without Nationalism* (1993) evinces Kristeva's interest in cosmopolitanism for, although she does conclude that French nationalism should not be done away with, she clearly favours a notion of nationalism that is inclusive of other cultural groups which inhabit French territorial space. Kristeva (1993:13) herself finds comfort in what she terms 'a transnational or international position situated at the crossing of boundaries'.

The belief in a global or international village as implied by Kristeva's observation is a cornerstone of postcolonial theories which bolster a universalist rather than a nationalist conception of national identity and which place an accent on the cultural representation of the nation. Proponents of such theories include Homi Bhabha, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Stuart Hall, Edward Said, and Salman Rushdie. For present purposes, Bhabha's, Appiah's, and Hall's positions will be considered. It is pertinent to note at this juncture that their notion of universalism has been perceived to reproduce an imperial discourse that equates western culture with modern and universal culture (see Bill Ashcroft *et al.* 1995; and Theodore H. Von Laue, 1997). Interestingly, Von Laue suggests that the universalizing tendency of Western culture is helped by Third World 'intellectuals who emigrate to the West, often creating, with the help of compassionate Western scholars, a Westernized version of their traditional cultures' (1997). However, writing from a Marxist perspective, Aijaz Ahmad presents an alternative perspective, arguing that universalist theories of nation serve a captilalism cause. As he sees it, 'the national bourgeoisie, like imperialist capitalism itself, want a weak nation-state in relation to capital and a strong one in relation to labour' (1995:11).

Embodying as it does a universalist perspective, Homi Bhabha's concept of nation is closely linked to his view of national culture, not as a 'homogeneous' reality but as being continually in 'a process of displacement and disjunction' (1994b:5). He identifies postcolonial migration (in its various forms, including 'cultural and political diaspora', 'exile', 'political and economic refugees') as the major factor in the emergence and spread of a national culture. In his view, a national culture in the context of a modern nation is a hybrid culture resulting from the coexistence of the indigenous cultural community and the nation's new communities of migration. It is typical of his theorization that these new 'minorities' are seen as key players in the cultural politics of the modern nation, as is clear from his observation that

> The discourse of minorities, spoken for and against in the multicultural wars, proposes a social subject constituted through cultural hybridization, the overdetermination of communal or group differences, the articulation of baffling alikeness and banal divergence. (Bhabha, 1996:54)

According to Bhabha, the reality of this coexistence of various communities attests to the fact that the modern nation is larger than geographical entities, not just in terms of its territorial boundaries but also in terms of the number of cultural communities it encompasses - hence the metaphor of nation as a cultural space. In this context, the terms 'frontiers'/'borders' and 'borderposts' acquire new meanings for they refer not only to territorial demarcations between nation-states but are also tied to the distinctions between cultural communities, as can be seen in the following extract from an essay by Smadan Lavie and Ted Swedenberg (1997:166-167):

> Borderzones are sites of creative cultural creolizations, places where criss-crossed identities are forged out of debris of corroded, formerly (would-be) homogeneous identities, zones where the residents often refuse the geo-political univocality of the

> lines. As such, the border is a process of deterritorialization that occurs both to, and between, the delimited political realities of a First World and the Third World. Yet borders are not just places of imaginative interminglings and happy hybridities to be celebrated. They are mobile territories whose constant clashes with the Eurocenter's imposition of fixity of culture makes them minefields.... They are zones of loss, alienation, pain, death - spaces where formations of violence are continually in the making.

The postcolonial appropriation and formulation of these terms is by no means a suggestion that the modern nation has a postcolonial identity. In fact, the modern nation is explicitly construed in many discussions as involving the reality of displacement to the metropolis. Thus, as Bhabha (1994b:9) suggests, identification with the nation through what he refers to as 'the borderline community of migration' is a function of whether the migrant manages to identify with a culture that is at once his/hers and the native's. In his essay 'Frontiers/Borderposts' (1994a: 271), he implicitly restates this point when he asks the question:

> As the migrant and the refugee become the 'unhomely' inhabitants of the contemporary world, how do we rethink collective , communal concepts like homeland, the people, cultural exile, national cultures, interpretative communities?

Here again, it is pertinent to note how the issue of the global nation is phrased in terms of the location of its centre, and the relation between communities and cultures of origin and migration to the centre.

Unlike Renan, for example, Bhabha considers that the past alone plays no major role in the emergence of national culture. He speaks of the culturally defined space of the nation as 'a space of intervention' wherein takes place 'an encounter with "newness" that is not part of the continuum of past and present' (1994b:7). Such a redefining of the concept of

national culture reveals that the modern nation as theorized by Bhabha is not the same 'nation' as that understood by political theorists such as Renan, Hobsbawm and Gellner, who were discussed earlier.

Appiah (1997), in a discussion of cosmopolitanism, clearly aligns himself with Kristeva's critique of nationalism, alluded to earlier, when he portrays himself as a cosmopolitan patriot and not a nationalist. By showing that patriotism is not incompatible with cosmopolitanism, he is able to point to the limitations of nationalism through his understanding of the nation as an arbitrary concept. 'Nations,' he states (1997:624), 'matter morally, when they do, in other words, for the same reason that football and opera matter: as things desired by autonomous agents, whose autonomous desires we ought to acknowledge and take account of, even if we cannot always accede to them'.

Thus, Appiah does not look at nationalism as either a permanent or even a desirable attribute. In his conception, the nation in the traditional sense discussed above has a reduced status. His view of the global nation as a 'cosmopolis of which we cosmopolitans would be not figurative but literal citizens' (1997:624) sides with Kristeva's notion alluded to above, for he speaks of 'the rich possibilities of association within and across their borders; states of which [cosmopolitans] can be patriotic citizens' (624). Appiah argues that the precariousness of the concept of the 'nation' surfaces in connection with 'the creation of a national common culture to center our lives' and the supposed necessity 'for us to center [sic] ourselves on a national culture' (632). For Appiah, like other universalist theorists referred to above, presumes an emphasis on and celebration of cultural hybridity

and migration, as reflected in his characterization of the cosmopolitan patriot as someone who

> can entertain the possibility of a world in which *everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people. The cosmopolitan imagines that in such a world not everyone will find it best to stay in their natal patria, so that the circulation of people among different localities will involve not only cultural tourism (which the cosmopolitan admits to enjoying) but migration, nomadism, diaspora. (1997: 618)

The stress on 'pluralized identity', which Appiah's statement underscores, highlights another dimension of the global nation, which is predicated by Stuart Hall (1995) on 'the break[ing] out of the boundaries once the nation begins to weaken out ...'. However, Hall is careful to point out that he believes in the weakening of the nation state, not its outright disappearance. Referring to the process of identification that accompanies the crossing of boundaries, he explains that as the gendered self moves on to occupy different spaces (class, ethnic group, nation state, global nation, the postmodern, and so on), so it becomes 'pluralized'. With a clear reference to Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as imagined community, Hall (1995) emphasizes the symbolic significance of his spatial allusions. In his words,

> The boundaries we draw are always in part symbolic. The communities with which we identify are not always places we can put on the map. But they are places in the mind.... They are imaginary communities. It is an imaginary geography in part which produces the places to which we belong.

Hall's remarks confirm Anderson's argument that identity communities are mental constructions. Underlining as they do the fact that identities are spatially defined, they certainly provide a caveat for the reading of narratives of national identity as fictional

constructions of multiple identities. Indeed, what emerges from Hall's argument, and is interesting as far as this study is concerned, is the suggestion that, in the same way that the self is 'pluralized', representations of such communities as family, ethnic community, diasporic community, nation, and global village can be intricately linked. His characterization of identities as 'more the product of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of of an identical, naturally constituted unity' (1996:4) both reinforces his point about multiple identity and aligns him with Appiah's school of thinking about cosmopolitan identity, referred to above.

After this overview of the main theoretical discourses of the nation, it becomes necessary to establish the approach which is used in this thesis. Bhabha (1990:3) suggests that an approach that takes account of 'the Janus-faced ambivalence of the language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation' (already alluded to in a different context) is the most appropriate for a reading of narratives of the nation. Such an approach requires the critic to be alert to the '*in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated' (1990:4). In his essay 'DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation', Bhabha goes on to explain that rather than simply attending to those spaces, one needs also to consider the temporality of the nation (its 'double-time'). In his view, this condition requires appropriate strategies - 'complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of "the people" or "the nation" and make them the immanent subjects and objects of a range of social and literary narratives' (1990:292) - so that the national text allows itself to be understood. As he sees it, a discussion of the people and their social condition, and particularly their way of living difference in the context of the 'modern' nation, requires a

consideration of the 'space of the people' or nation-space. In Bhabha's theorizing, the nation-space is not only a geo-political entity but also 'a liminal form of social representation, a space that is *internally* marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural authorities' (1990:299).

The emphasis on difference as a representational mode is an important dimension of the present project. Indeed the main assumption of this thesis is that difference lies at the heart of the representations of the nation offered in the texts selected for analysis. Accordingly, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the complex and central role of difference in these representations of the nation as well as the various strategies employed by the authors of those texts to incorporate difference into their construction of the imagined community of the Zimbabwean nation. This focus is warranted by the fact that, a multi-racial and multi-ethnic nation, Zimbabwe has a history of celebration of difference, not just as a characteristic of a plural society but also as a space of dis-identification with the racialized, cultural and social Other. For this reason, concern with categories of difference (racial and cultural, obviously, but also class, gender, social, moral, and so on) is central in much of Zimbabwean literature. Indeed, Zimbabwean writers share with their fellow African writers what Revathi Krishnaswamy (1995) has identified as a desire to 'continue to assert a localized postcolonial identity based on essentialist notions of purity *and* difference' [emphasis mine] (140) in contrast to migrant writers like V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie who display 'a deterritorialized consciousness freed from such collectivities as race, class, gender, or nation...' (139). Most Zimbabwean writers, with perhaps the exception of Dambudzo Marechera whose

work testifies to a sense of 'deterritorialized consciousness', easily conform to Krishnaswamy's characterization.

Thus, this chapter takes account of the need to explore the interplay between nation and narration advocated by Bhabha which, as already intimated, derives from Anderson's view that nations are 'imagined communities' and therefore can be textualized. This theoretical model provides the possibility to question the ways in which African narratives of the nation have been read thus far. With the emphasis placed in this theorization on the 'imaginary geography' of the nation, there is a further need to investigate the ways in which Zimbabwe is imagined as a cultural space. This concept of an imagined space of the nation entails in turn a close consideration of the notion of difference implicit in the use of the terms border, periphery, centre, and so on. In different ways, each of the texts selected for analysis focuses on communities within the space of the nation and explores the ways in which they exist in relation to one another. Thus, as a model that encourages an exploration of the imaginary construction of the nation and an interpretation of difference within cultural spaces, Bhabha's theory of nation as a cultural space suits the purpose of this project. But to avoid the danger of subscribing to a single approach, this study calls for a consideration of other critical rejoinders to the theory of nation, including those by Appiah, Edward Said, Stuart Hall and Gayatri Spivak which are further elaborated when and as necessary.

The idea of representation implied in the title of the thesis is understood in the Foucauldian sense of 're-presentation', which also informs Bhabha's theory of nation. It is purposefully chosen to allow space for a discussion of strategies of representation of

Zimbabwe as cultural space and a consideration of how relationships between people within that space are culturally characterized, in the text under scrutiny. As Michael Gerald Maranda puts it in his essay entitled 'Mirroring Nations' (1996), 'what is important about the nation is not what it is but what it represents itself to be'. This observation is particularly relevant to the thrust of this study as it implies the possibility of understanding the master narrative of the Zimbabwean nation through comprehending the 'individual' narratives discussed in this study.

In addition to drawing on the theoretical framework outlined above, the thesis will also refer to other aspects of literary theory, particularly those of the current theoretical discourses on the gendering of the nation, given the fact that there seems to be a consensus among the three writers selected for discussion - John Eppel, Dambudzo Marechera and Yvonne Vera - in using female characters as national icons and in inscribing the female body as a trope for the nation. This thesis attempts to uncover these and other symbolisms in its readings of the selected texts, namely Eppel's *Spoils of War* (1989), *D G G Berry's The Great North Road* (1992), *Hatchings* (1993) and *Sonata for Matabeleland* (1995); Vera's *Nehanda* (1993); and Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978), *Mindblast* (1984), *The Depth of Diamond* (1985, unpublished), *The Black Insider* (1990), *Cemetery* of *Mind* (1992) and *Scrapiron Blues* (1994).

In addition to the theoretical framework and the approach presented above, attention to the nationalist trend of Zimbabwean literature and to the authors of the texts selected for analysis in this thesis is central to the following chapters. Flora Veit-Wild, in *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers* (1992b:1), observes that Zimbabwe's literary history presents very few similarities with that of other African countries:

> The typical pattern in the development of African literature - a phase of cultural nationalism and anti-colonial protest followed by a phase of post-colonial disillusionment - shifted in the case of Zimbabwe. Here post-colonial disenchantment and criticism of African leadership emerged even before independence was achieved; a residual cultural nationalism co-existed with a modernist existentialist perspective.

This is undoubtedly a useful tip for those interested in examining cultural and ideological elements in Zimbabwean tales of the nation. Veit-Wild's presentation of Zimbabwean literature carries the idea of an exclusively black literature, which is understandable in terms of her objectives in her seminal book. However, the conception of Zimbabwean literature that this thesis adheres to is that literary texts produced by white Zimbabweans are an integral part of Zimbabwean literature, a point that Preben Kaarsholm (1994:327) makes in his review essay on Veit-Wild's book. It is common enough not to recognize this fact, because of the divided history of the country and the fact that the dominant feature of that literature is, as pertinently noted by Veit-Wild (1992b), a preoccupation with cultural nationalism. The work of John Eppel, one of the three authors whose works are examined in this thesis, shows that the conception of an inclusive Zimbabwean literature, when adhered to by critics and students of Zimbabwean literature, could generate a more complete picture of that literature.

And yet, the colonial literary history of Zimbabwe could indeed give the conception denounced here some justification. As Anthony Chennells (1996:128) has noted in relation to white Rhodesian fictional literary texts:

> None provides new insights into Rhodesia; they instigate no new understanding of either the settlers or the Black world, although for nearly 30 years before Zimbabwean independence, more and more articulate statements by Black leaders had demanded that Rhodesian whites look at blacks in a different way.

In Chennells's retrospective view, there were two discursive spaces that characterized the fictional world in colonial Rhodesia:

> ... white space which was open to appropriate new items for the discourse which named itself progressive; a Black space which belonged to a primitive past and which, because it was closed by the white discourse, was incapable of any new disclosure of what Blacks were within that space or could become if they rejected its boundaries. In the end both the discursive space and the literal geographical space in which racist legislation had over the years embodied the discourse were smashed by war. (1996:129)

Because of this history, much of contemporary Zimbabwean literature appears as a literature that attempts to create the new discursive space that is necessary to contribute to the grand narrative of the new postcolonial nation, alluded to above. This master narrative is that of a once fragmented nation that negotiates the differences within itself in order to promote a multicultural citizenship. It is one further challenge of this study to examine how each of the micro-narratives selected for this study engages with this master narrative.

At this juncture, it seems useful to address briefly the question of whether a national Zimbabwean literature, in fact, exists and, if so, what nationalist purposes it serves, for Bernth Lindfors' (1997) claim that there are no national literatures in sub-Saharan Africa entails the supposition that the texts selected for analysis in this project have no national value. Lindfors argues his thesis on the grounds that African nations are ethnically,

culturally and linguistically divided nations. In his view, the notion of a national literature is tied to the commonality of experience for its population groups:

> A "national literature" presupposes a national experience which is unique and distinguishable from national experiences elsewhere. Most African nations are so heterogeneous in population and consequently so incredibly complicated in social structure, political organization and historical development that the experiences of one group in the society will not be representative of those of all other groups in the society. If a writer elects to treat a theme such as birth, marriage or death - to mention only the most basic possibilities - he will have to set it in a special social context which will immediately make it uncharacteristic of groups which exist in different social circumstances. (1997:126-127)

Lindfors is certainly right to point to the fact that African nations are, as he puts it, creations of European statesmen. Needless to say, however, his entire argument is circular and characteristic of a conservative Western discourse on nationalism according to which the juxtaposition of different tribes within African nation-states means that such states can never become nations. Such a position, which develops from a history of representation of the African as the Other, disregards the fact that decades of struggle for independence may have united people from different tribes and even from different racial groups. Such a view also helps to understand why Mordechai Tamarkin (1996:366), who is convinced that 'The African nation-state was constructed by the intellectual imagination of African leaders and foreign scholars, rather than by the socio-moral imagination of its African citizens', advocates a return for Africans to 'a traditional moral order' based on ethnic consciousness. Tamarkin seeks support in Ngugi's assertion that there is no inherent contradiction for Africans 'between belonging to their immediate nationality, to their multinational state along the Berlin-drawn boundaries, and to Africa as a whole' (1986:23) in order to repudiate the notion of the nation-state in Africa. In the literary

sphere, this argument can be situated within a conservative strand in African criticism which holds that African nations cannot develop national literatures and which regards African literatures as appendices of Europhone literatures.

To prove his point Lindfors further argues that the distinction between tribes in African countries is so acute that no one group's experiences can have meaning for another group. In a paradoxical revision of Lindfors's argument in his own country (the USA), writers such as Toni Morrison and and Alice Walker narrate experiences of the African American population group in terms that do not always apply to other groups in the country. But, if as Morrison (1992:17) also concedes - aligning herself theoretically with Lindfors - that literature reflects how peoples 'choose to talk about themselves', then African American literature is both national and tribal. It follows that the texts examined in this thesis are also part of a Zimbabwean national literature. Written by authors who belong to different races, classes and genders in Zimbabwean society, these texts describe experiences and deal with themes that have national significance as they reveal preoccupations with issues of national identity in a culturally hybrid space. The same can be said of a number of other African national literatures, including South African literature which, incidentally and somewhat paradoxically (because it implies the very notion of hybridity propounded here which he rejects for the rest of the African continent), Lindfors regards as the only truly emerging national literature in sub-Saharan Africa.

Turning now to the issue of the nationalist concerns of Zimbabwean literature, it is widely acknowledged that this literature is mainly preoccupied, through its first generation of writers, with 'attempts to recreate history and a national identity' and, through writers of the

second generation, with 'the process of deracination they underwent as children' (Veit-Wild, 1992b:10). The first has been the central motif underpinning narratives of the liberation war, which constitute an important part of Zimbabwean literature. Chenjerai Hove's observation (in Michael Chapman,1996:301) that 'the war forced us back into history from the margins' captures the essence of the nationalist thrust of Zimbabwean war narratives. Interestingly, such nationalist concerns are not peculiar to literature by Zimbabwean blacks, as Chennells's (1996) discussion of Rhodesian war novels reveals.

As already stated, this thesis focuses on the strategies of representing the nation in the works of three Zimbabwean writers: John Eppel, Yvonne Vera and Dambudzo Marechera. These three authors have been chosen not only as representatives of various groups within the Zimbabwean society but also because of their common interest in using difference as a representational strategy in their treatment of the nation. Furthermore, their works selected for study offer various standpoints from which the writing of the Zimbabwean nation can be understood. Marechera writes from the position of a universalist bohemian writer positioned at the margins of his society, Eppel from that of a 'white Zimbabwean who belongs and yet does not belong to his country, and has very mixed feelings about his past' (Eppel, 1996:19), while Vera provides the perspective of a female writer strongly influenced by her experiences of life in rural Zimbabwe. Seen from these two angles, their writings of Zimbabwe reveal something about the complexity of the concept of nation that cannot be interpreted solely in terms of the established frame of reference in Zimbabwean literature, and it is this unique quality that provides some justification for the present enterprise. Worth stressing is a relative paucity of critical attention to these authors who are seminal to the debate on writing the nation. Their texts

selected for analysis represent a varied corpus as they include a settler narrative, a novel of the first *Chimurenga*, narratives of exile, a thriller, a narrative of postcolonial culture and poems. The argument for this study is the need to fill a perceived gap in research that has thus far been conducted on the writing of the nation in Zimbabwean literature. This thesis thus addresses an aspect that has hitherto been neglected by critics and that warrants critical attention.

Eppel's work consists of three satirical novels and two collections of poems. In an interview with Richard Saunders, he insists that his works are committed to his country and his past. As Eppel himself says in that interview, he is very conscious of his particular situation as a white man in his country. His writing, he says, 'echoes the dialectical relationship I have with my past - and present - as first a white Rhodesian and now a white Zimbabwean' (Eppel and Saunders, 1995:15). He has explained his use of satire in his novels, and lyricism in his poetry, as his ways of expressing this relationship. By focusing on his work, this thesis attempts to show that his satire contributes to his representation of the Zimbabwean nation as a complex and changing nation. Unlike writers writing from a position of exiles or immigrants, he can look at the reality of his country, and write about it fearlessly and, more importantly, authoritatively, though in fictional form.

The difficulty of writing from an immigrant's or expatriate's perspective is well captured in Salman Rushdie's (1991:10) remarks, inspired by his experience in revisiting India, that 'writers in my position, exiles or immigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt'. In Eppel's case, as will become clear in this thesis, there is no such sense of loss

but rather a desire either to provide a testimony of the colonial or postcolonial national culture, exploring the danger of difference for such a culture, as he does in his novels and some of his poems, or to describe and narrate national landscapes, as he does mostly in his poetry. Thus, the two aspects of his writing of his nation which this thesis examines are his writing of the nation as people and his writing of the nation as a cultural space. In the novels, he very often focuses on small rural communities which are microcosms of the Zimbabwean society as a whole. Relationships between individual characters within those microcosms acquire greater significance once understood in the general context of the Zimbabwean nation.

John Eppel's personal circumstances shed light on his imaginary construction of the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean nation. A white man, he did not have to leave the country; a situation which theoretically placed him in a position of antagonism towards the liberation war. As this thesis hopes to show, Eppel's work exudes not racism and bitterness as one might expect from a white Rhodesian (Zimbabwean) but a deep love for his country, and particularly his native Matabeleland, and also a deep concern for its postcolonial situation. His satire is directed not at individual characters *per se* but at representatives of colonial or postcolonial national culture. Part of his novelty thus has to do with his representation of Zimbabwe as a space wherein the various cultures of the nation interact with one another and, particularly with his attempt at undermining difference. His work introduces a new perspective in Zimbabwean literature as it blends images of the past with concerns about dislocation in a society marked by the new power relations between racial groups. He adopts stances that mirror the divided soul of white Zimbabwe and the relation of settler history to the present and future of Zimbabwe.

Writing from a perspective which is different from that of Eppel, Marechera 'gives violent expression to all the violence his generation has experienced, to the deracination, homelessness, alienation, anger and despair which have marked their spiritual being' (Flora Veit-Wild, 1992a:258). According to Veit-Wild, Marechera's generation of writers differ from their predecessors whose writings betrayed a strong nationalist sentiment, by producing works of a more fictional nature and which were more marked by their everyday experiences of life in racist Rhodesia. This thesis subscribes to Veit-Wild's view but argues that Marechera's work, like that of other writers of his generation, reveals ambivalent images of his country. As Veit-Wild has also noted, his own problems as a student at the University of Rhodesia, his homelessness and marginalization both in England and in his home country after his return - all these experiences deeply affected his attitude towards his country, and account for the negative image of his country that his work reveals. As a result, critics and colleagues have seen Marechera's work as the product of a deranged mind. The designation of his oeuvre in those terms does not, however, do justice to the fact that disillusionment with his own country could be at the origin of the anarchist views expressed in his writings. It should be remembered that Zimbabweans, both in England and in his own country, were critical and ashamed of Marechera's lifestyle. The fact that he was perceived, and perceived himself, as a controversial figure also contributed significantly to the way he portrays himself and his home environment in his work.

Marechera's self-imposed status as a bohemian writer alerts us to the fact that he was a marginalized writer. His marginalization was not only social but was also related to Zimbabwean literature and African literature as a whole, as Veit-Wild (1987:113) has pointed out:

> Dambudzo Marechera is an outsider. He cannot be included in any of the categories into which modern African literature is currently divided; his writings have nothing in common with the various forms of anti-colonial or anti-neocolonial protest literature, nor can they be interpreted as being an expression of the identity crisis suffered by an African exiled in Europe.

David Buuck (1997:118) endorses this view when he asserts that Marechera 'stands outside the conventions of categorisations of African writing due largely to his class status. By not functioning within the international exchange of cultural production, Marechera remains doubly marginalised: invisible in the West and misunderstood at "home"'. Of particular interest to this project is Marechera's location of his literary approach in the idea that his primary attachment as a writer is to the world, not to a single nation, a point he stresses in his self-interview, quoted in Veit-Wild (1992a:221):

> I think I am the doppelganger whom, until I appeared, African literature had not yet met. And in this sense I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you. In other words, the direct international experience of every single living entity is for me the inspiration to write. But at the same time I am aware of my vulnerability - that I am only me - and of my mortality: and that's why it seems to me a waste of time to waste anybody's life in regulation. In ordering them ....

In other words, Marechera sees himself as a cosmopolitan writer whose mission is not to celebrate a nation but to celebrate the centrality, the universality of cultural experience. As will become clear in Chapter Four, his refusal of national identity has significant implications for a discussion of the representation of Zimbabwe in his work. The challenge will be to show that, though his work is marked by 'postcolonial repudiations of fixity and purity', to use Krishnaswamy's phrase (1995:140), his location at the Third Space (cf. Veit-Wild, 1996) and exile, because of the dis(location) they entail, constitute contexts of

difference from which he wrote his nation. Because a nation is a community that encompasses 'other nations', other communities, different characters, his work is bound to reflect and comment on the types of difference that characterize relations between such communities and/or characters.

By contrast, Yvonne Vera writes from the perspective of the subaltern in the Spivakan sense that her work highlights the experiences of the Zimbabwean black female subject, and is infused with a strong desire to provide a female peasant perspective which, with perhaps the exception of Chenjerai Hove and Tsitsi Dangarembga's work, has been sadly absent from Zimbabwean literature. One reviewer of Vera's most recent novel *Under the Tongue* (1996) has captured the uniqueness of Vera's art by noting that her entire work is influenced by her childhood life experience in a rural township during the liberation war and that this particular novel is 'a celebration of home, of Africa, of Zimbabwe, of life in the villages and townships' (Jane Rosenthal, 1996: 41). This influence and experience resonate in her work whether she writes about the contemporary situation (as she has done in *Without a Name*, 1994; and *Under the Tongue*, 1996) or when she goes back into the early colonial past as she does in her novel *Nehanda* (1994), discussed in Chapter Five, to situate the origins of the nation. This thesis posits that Vera explores difference in her writing of the nation through her re-writing of the first liberation war, a project in which she inverts the binary relations between the settler and the indigene.

The thesis as a whole consists of six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, which sets the theoretical framework for this study, Chapter Two shows that John Eppel constructs in *The Great North Road* an imaginary settler community in which the natives

are constituted as occupying the margins of the colonial nation-state. It argues that such a construction is compatible with the othering of the natives in the Rhodesian colonial narrative that Eppel's novel disrupts.

In Chapter Three, the thesis looks at another novel set in the colonial period, although the time here is early colonial in contrast to the late colonial setting of Eppel's text discussed in the previous chapter. It reads Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* as a novel which promotes cultural difference as a way to underscore a representation of the Shona people in the early days of colonial rule, as a nation assaulted culturally and deprived of its territory and one which fights to recover its lost identity and land.

Focusing on selected texts by Dambudzo Marechera, Chapter Four explores the ways in which this writer provides representations of a (colonial and postcolonial) nation he refuses to identify with. It proposes that Marechera's occupation of a position of marginality, the 'third space', allows him to give an uncompromising picture of his nation and to claim a universalist identity.

In Chapter Five, the thesis returns to Eppel in order to consider his representation of the postcolonial Zimbabwean nation in his novel *Hatchings* and in some poems from his collection *Sonata for Matabeleland*. The argument here is that a concern with moral as well as immigrant/ native differences informs Eppel's representation in these texts.

Chapter Six summarizes the main arguments presented in the analyses of representations of Zimbabwe in the works selected for this study, focusing on the ways in which these

representations reveal a common interest among the three writers selected for discussion in using of difference as a strategy for writing the plurality of the Zimbabwean nation.

Thus, the arrangement of the four central chapters is governed by the need to provide different facets of representation of the nation in both the pre- and post-independence contexts. Chapters Two and Three are presented as contiguous in terms of representation as they both deal with 'imagined communities' that are constructed around the colonizer/colonized dichotomy. Chapter Four, which discusses Marechera's representation of his nation under and after colonialism, can be seen as a bridge between the two previous chapters and Chapter Five. Moreover, Chapters Four and Five focus on texts in which other kinds of difference and the issue of cosmopolitanism in a postcolonial context are brought in to displace racial difference as a significant ingredient in the narratives of the Zimbabwean nation.