CHAPTER THREE:

REMAPPING THE COLONIAL SPACE: YVONNE VERA'S *NEHANDA*

The discussion of the duty camp incident in John Eppel's novel *The Great North Road* in Chapter Two has revealed that the liberation war was perceived by the colonial settlers in Rhodesia as a threat to their 'national' space. The term 'terr' (short for terrorist) used in Rhodesian official discourse (and in Eppel's novel by the men in Duiker Berry's C Section) to refer to the liberation fighter carries the suggestion, implied in the Anthony Chennells (1996:104) passage quoted in Chapter Two (see part 1), that its referent destabilizes the settler community's supposedly moral and civilized order. Read in the light of Chennells's observation about the settler's perception of the liberation war quoted in Chapter Two, Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda*, though set in the first *Chimurenga*, can be seen to challenge this settler-constructed representation of the liberation war, by constructing it as resistance to what Barbara Harlow (1987:10) terms 'the programmatic cultural imperialism which accompanied western economic, military, and political domination of the Third World'. This chapter argues that, unlike Eppel's *The Great North Road* which disrupts the colonialist narrative by problematizing difference, Vera's text reclaims difference to refute the settler's mapping of the colonial space. In this way she is able to construct the indigenous community of her novel as a 'nation' threatened in its cohesiveness and identity by a foreign invasion. The chapter shows how such a representation of the 'nation' is made explicit through Vera's figuration of her heroine Nehanda as an intermediary between the 'natives' and their ancestors, as well as through her text's foregrounding of the uprising as a struggle for national liberation.

Geography, in narratives of resistance, is important because of its association with the cultural consciousness of the nation through the ancestors who are believed to own the land. For this reason, the living cherish the land and are ready to fight for it. It is this very special and emotional association with the land and the granting of, so to speak, an affective personality to the geography, as well as the difference between foreigner/outsider and native/insider, that this discussion hopes to show as informing Vera's representation of colonial Zimbabwe. As the reader would have understood, the term 'nation' and 'natives' as used in the context of this chapter refer to the Shona people whose uprising against the early Rhodesian settlers is fictionalized in Vera's text.

The argument in this chapter is informed by Edward Said's discussion of the territorial and cultural dimension of resistance in the colonial context offered in his seminal book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Particularly useful to the purpose of this chapter is Said's notion of the narrative of resistance as essentially a tale of land re-appropriation that deconstructs the imperial narrative of appropriation. As he argues:

> If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical element. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally, brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. Because of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first through the imagination. (1993:225)

The extent to which geography as well as the outsider/native dichotomy are central in *Nehanda* will become clear as the chapter concentrates, in Part One, on Vera's construction of her heroine, and, in Part Two, on that of the settler. In Part Three, the

chapter considers the way in which the text reveals two representations of the nation: one that relates to the colonial setting and another, futuristic, that relates to the postcolonial context, not unlike those representations proposed in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1978).

PART ONE

Vera's text is structured around Nehanda, the prophetess and war leader, who embodies resistance to colonialism. Her representation in the novel provides a site in which the mythical aspect of her personality works to underscore her role in the liberation war as ancestor-inspired and thus patriotic, in contrast to the imperial and commercial motives of the colonial invaders. To the degree that Nehanda is constructed as an intermediary between the ancestral spirits and the living, she symbolizes the nation in its African sense of a community consisting of the departed and the living. As Vera's heroine is reminded by her mother: 'The dead are not dead. They are always around us, protecting us' (27). Nehanda's life story provides Vera with a narrative space in which to explore the relationship between these two parts of the nation. The novel suggests that Nehanda's life, and particularly the events in her life narrativized in the text, attest to the intervention of the ancestors in the affairs of the nation. Thus, in her novel, Vera rewrites the colonial history of her nation by suggesting that the anti-colonial uprising which Nehanda embodies is not, as colonial history would see it, an attempt by natives to resist civilization but the expression of her people's desire to recover what they believe to be their land and their way of life.

Eldred D. Jones (1997:50) has argued that

> Although it is dominated by the life of one woman, Nehanda, with whose birth it opens and whose defiant encounter with Browning in the prison cell ends the linear narration, the novel is really concerned with the spirit of the people which stretches back into time and is inextricably linked with the land itself which in turn enshrines the spirits of the ancestors.

Jones makes here a valid point, which reinforces another one made earlier in this chapter, namely that land is important because of its association with the ancestors. However, the suggestion that Nehanda plays no central role in the story is less convincing. It would be a mistake to dismiss Nehanda's life as an accessory to an exploration of the spirit of the people, as Jones's statement seems to imply. For it is through the story of her life that the issues of national identity and national liberation which Vera's text answers are textualized. It is in delving into her character's life that Vera is able to explore these issues. As this discussion hopes to show, constructed as it is as a gift from one part of the nation to another and thus as a bridge between them, a point well understood in the Shona traditional beliefs which inform Vera's text, Nehanda's life is a centrepiece in Vera's project of reclaiming national geography and identity. Therefore, an analysis of the representation of the nation in Vera's text would not be complete unless it examines the connection Vera establishes between Nehanda's life and the concept of cultural nationalism her life embodies.

In considering Vera's construction of Nehanda as a mythic persona, three events in her life will be considered: her birth, her involvement in the anti-colonial uprising, and her death. Nehanda's death in a prison cell provides the novel with its starting-point. This would appear as a surprising beginning for a novel that celebrates armed resistance

against imperialism. However, Nehanda's death is not narrativized as an ordinary death. In the first section of the novel, Vera portrays her as a Christ-figure dying from wounds she suffered from her beating at the hands of the agents of an usurping and ruthless colonial power. Like Christ, Nehanda is presented as a person who believes that her death serves, if not immediately to liberate her nation from colonial bondage, at least to plant the seed of their future liberation. It is possible to see this admixture of Christianity and tribal mythology as the only space of compromise with the colonizer's worldview in a novel in which, as mentioned earlier, the articulation of difference - in a way that is different from Eppel's in *The Great North Road* - forms the cornerstone of Vera's writing of the nation.

The opening paragraph describes her sufferings in the prison cell:

> Ants pull carcasses into a hole, and she is not surprised. Pain sears the lines on her palms, and she turns her eyes to her hands in wonder. Rivers and trees cover her palms; the trees are lifeless and the rivers dry. She feels that gaping wound, everywhere. It is red like embers, but soft like water. The wound has been shifting all over her body, and she can no longer find it. (1)

This passage is striking because the pain to which Nehanda is exposed contrasts with her optimistic state of mind. As suggested earlier, she does not conceive of her death as a tragedy but as a price that needs to be paid for the liberation of her nation. This may help to explain why she is able to experience pain as she does. As the sentence 'It is red like embers, and soft like water' vividly illustrates, Nehanda appears to possess the ability to transcend pain. It seems clear from this sentence and from the second paragraph in the text that, by speaking of her heroine's ability to detach herself from her body and to see herself from the perspective of another, Vera wants to emphasize Nehanda's mythic nature.

It is also pertinent to consider the second paragraph:

> ... Her arms feel boneless to her spirit. The earth moves. She feels her body turn to water. Insects sing in and out of her armpits. She looks up in surprise and her body has changed from water to stone. Water gathers in her eyes, which have been filled with dark heavy clouds, and it is as though it has rained.... She gasps as she feels another part of her depart in a graceless trickling of yellow liquid. (1-2)

As if standing in the background is the other part of Vera's protagonist, her spirit, which looks on her body's sufferings and fragmentation. This passage illustrates Vera's way of stressing the predominance of Nehanda's spiritual being over her corporeal being. Because of this, Nehanda is surprised to see that 'her body has changed from water to stone' and that 'another part of her has left her' (1).

Nehanda's description in the third paragraph as a depositor of words, that is, of tradition, adds to her image as a mythic figure:

> Nehanda carries her bag of words in a pouch that lies tied round her waist. She wears some along her arms. Words and bones. Yellow becomes crimson. She follows the crimson path that forms a meandering shape in the distance, in the world of dreams. She travels to the faraway place where her body turns to smoke. The comforting crimson brings her closer to her own death. She raises her hands above her head as though supporting a falling roof. She gestures into the sky with frantic arms. She laughs. The skin tears further away from her, and she knows that the damage to herself is now irreversible. Nothing will save her from this final crimson of death; it is too much like her inner self. (2)

The true meaning of the above passage is located in the terms 'words' and 'dreams'. With these words Vera invests Nehanda with the power of ideas and discourse. This power is registered by the image of the pouch of words that she is described as carrying. Once again the reader is made to realize that Nehanda is more than a creature of bones and body, the insignificance of her physical being at this moment of her death being here

underscored by the suggestion that it turns into smoke. It is significant that later on in the narrative, Nehanda is granted agency as a narrator. This strategy allows Vera to state her own views on national politics as if they were those of her heroine.

With this dramatic episode of Nehanda's last moments in her prison cell, the reader is given a glimpse of Vera's construction of her heroine. However, it is through the account of her birth and of her subsequent role as an intermediary between the ancestors and their descendants that the narrator reveals more clearly Nehanda's agency in her nation's recovery of its cultural consciousness. As already noted, the book opens with her death, but this is quickly followed by her birth - the cyclic patterning is both deliberate and telling. The text presents her incoming birth as a special gift to the living from the departed:

> The departed had come to deliver a gift to the living, to shape the birth of voices, to grant the safe passage of the unborn. (3)

It is worth restating the point that, according to Shona traditional beliefs, the concept of the nation encompasses both the living and the departed ancestors who continue to take care of the living, a point that Terence O. Ranger (1979:18) alludes to when he speaks of '(the dead's) role as protector of the land and the people' and 'as forming the tender bridge between the living and the divine'. As the above extract from the novel also reveals, Nehanda's birth is described in terms that challenge the logic of biological conception. As in the case of the birth of Christ, hers was announced in dreams (the significance of which is captured later in this chapter) to a select group of individuals in the community by the ancestral spirits. These privileged individuals are the three women sitting in the room with

the young mother-to-be. Vera's narrator describes them as being fully aware of their privilege of being chosen:

> The circle of women asserted their strength through their calm posture, waiting. They looked upon their presence as a gift; this was not a chance for them to fail or to succeed; it was a time to rejoice, or else to mourn. They knew that the birth of the child, for whom they all awaited, was something that they did not have the power to control. They were here to accompany the mother, and the child, on their separate journeys. No one is allowed to make a journey alone. (4)

The characterization of the presence of the women in the room as a gift is something that is consistent with the idea, developed in Vera's text, of Nehanda as a landmark in the life of her nation. Notice how the above passage suggests that the women were privileged yet passive participants in an event that the ancestors of the land have organized. Notice also how the text analogizes Nehanda's birth to the beginning of a journey. Vera's use of the trope of a journey is considered later in the chapter. For the moment, though, it is important to consider how the circumstances of Nehanda's birth connect with the purpose of the novel through the presentation of the characters. The final word of the quotation 'alone' is also pregnant with meaning in its suggestion that the unity of the national community is reflected in the ways it prepares for the coming of its new members.

The presentation of the three women is made 'national' with the mention that they come from various parts of the land and represent a range of age groups, civil status, professions, and temperaments. The first woman is presented as a newlywed woman: 'She belonged to the village only through marriage, an event that had taken place three years previously' (4). This mode of presentation suggests that the nation is constructed as consisting of many villages. By her presence in the room this woman gives a national

sense to the event she is witnessing. Vera's narrator presents the second woman as a laborious, rural woman as is indicated by the remark that 'The day's waiting was perhaps more difficult for her than for the others because for her it was unnatural to sit still' (5). This remark suggests the impatience with idleness associated with peasant women. The third woman is described as a debonair widow and a trader who 'knew where the best markets were, and how people lived in far-flung villages' (5). This remark also points to the importance geography is given in this text. The nation is here presented as consisting of many villages located at some distance from a centre that appears to be Nehanda's birthplace. The importance of the land is further emphasized by the following description of the woman: 'she had a circle of huts, and land to plant her crops ' (5). The remark that 'She had no qualms about sitting on a stool like a man' serves to subvert what is considered as a masculine posture and is also part of Vera's narrative process, to assert the national representation effected by the women present. As in Armah, Vera looks to the woman for recovery of the land.

The two other women in the room are Vatete, the midwife, and the young mother-to-be. The midwife is described as 'the most important of the human presences in the room' (5) by virtue of the fact that she was the depositor of 'many memories' (5). The text further reveals that '[She] had tucked some of her secrets into the fold of skin around her knees and ankles, and around her elbows' (5). However, the aspect of her personality that the narrator stresses most prominently is her profession:

> Vatete was highly respected. When she failed to deliver a child into the world, it was understood that the spirits had intervened in the occurrence. For no matter how powerful and ambitious a mortal might be, the departed were in control. They determined who came into the world, and who did not. (6)

A careful reading of this passage indicates that Vatete's expertise as a midwife depends on the will of the 'dead'. This passage is one of the several reminders in the text that the ancestors have a say in the affairs of their descendants and that, in reality, there is no boundary between the living and the departed. The last member in this group of women is the mother-to-be. The description of the mother-to-be is a remarkable illustration of what Jones (1997) characterizes as Vera's close observation and fine portrayal:

> In this smoke-filled hut with its reluctant yellow light, a young woman was lying along the edge of mud wall, close to the raised mud platform on which the cooking utensils were kept. A series of rounded pots were piled delicately one on top of the other to a height that nearly reached the thatching, successively curving inward and outward to create a tall figure which filled her imagination with wonders of her existence.
>
> She slept on a wide grass mat with a low flat stool supporting her head. She was completely naked. The night was warm and her heels rested on a small black-haired goatskin which would later be used to make an apron to carry the child. The light that fell on her tired face revealed that her wrinkled brow was beaded with sweat. Though this was her first child, she was fortified by the presence of the other women. (6-7)

There is empathy and dignity in the description of this young woman and her surroundings, which befits the role that she plays in the story. The fact that her child's birth is a significant event is once more suggested by her realization of 'the wonders of her existence' and her fortitude.

In the following passage Vera's narrator offers an explanation of the gathering of the women in the room:

> The women were here to welcome the child. Each of them had already met the child in dreams which they could not recall. By visiting their dreams, the child had picked

> them out to receive her. If she had not wanted them, she would have kept them away from her birth. By their ungrudging presence the women had tied themselves irrevocably to the future of the child whom they had not yet seen. In the future, others would recognize the child by her gifts and her difference - her eyes that would see distances. Her eyes would brim with dancing prophecies of hope and despair. (6)

This passage is complex in its suggestion that Nehanda is both an object of spiritual intervention and an agent of this intervention. She is a gift from the departed. But she is also said to have visited the women in their dreams and chosen them to receive her. This shows that in a sense she is endowed with the same powers as the spirits of the departed. The passage once again calls attention to the women's being blessed in being selected for this privilege. Considered in the context of the whole story, this passage is pivotal in that it prepares the reader for future events in the story. It links Nehanda's birth to the future of the nation. She will emerge as a leader, making 'others', that is her people, recognize her as such. Her ability to see 'distances' and her 'prophecies of hope and despair' will affect the course of her people's history. The link between Nehanda's birth and the suggested birth or rebirth of the nation is an aspect that will be given consideration later in this chapter. At this juncture it is necessary to address the importance of the discourse of dreams in Vera's process of constructing Nehanda as a mythical figure, which is revealed by this episode of Nehanda's birth.

Part of Vera's broad strategy for constructing Nehanda as a mythical subject is precisely to play on the ontological analogy between dream and reality in African traditional society. Maggi Philips (1994:102), in her article on the use of the dreams in the works of African women writers Ama Ata Aidoo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Bushi Emecheta, Bessie Head, and Flora Nwapa, argues convincingly that it does not make sense to consider dreams and

dreaming in African texts from non-African perspectives, because 'the dream activity of these texts challenges interpretative closure'. She goes on to explain that 'for African writers, dream activity is a valuable storehouse of experience with which to explore narratives and question the nature of knowing across the breath and depth of the unending human history' (Philips, 1994:91). In her novel Vera constantly juxtaposes dream and reality so that the distinction between them becomes completely blurred. As used in her novel, this strategy enables her to construct Nehanda's life as an intervention of the ancestors in the affairs of the nation. It is also a narrative device that Vera uses effectively in the novel to recover the historical memory of the people.

The woman trader's dream exemplifies Vera's use of the dream for her mythic construction of her heroine. This dream is important in its structure as well as in its content, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

> "Did you say you walked for two days to arrive at the trading place?" the listeners asked, trustfully patting the dung-covered ground with open palms. With one mouth, the first two women questioned the trader, and moved closer together, their shoulders touching.
>
> "I said it took two days. That does not mean we walked for two days."
>
> "Do not hide your words, like ripe fruit in a tree. Tell us your true meaning."
>
> "That is the time it took before we could arrive, but I do not know how long we walked. We walked part of the time, and part of the time we rested. How much time is that?" She mocked her companions whom she knew had travelled little beyond their own homesteads.
>
> "You forgot to say that some of the time you were lost! Time is not something you can retrieve from behind an anthill after you have been lost all day. But then, only the owner of the dream knows what wonders have happened in dream."
>
> "Have you known a traveller who did not lose the way at least once? Unless you have walked the path before, how can you not get lost some of the time? Even an ant-eater, which is the rarest of wild animals, is one day seen crossing the clearing

> which surrounds a homestead, before the sun has gone to its mother. Is the ant-eater in search of human company or is it lost?" She answered defensively.
>
> "Perhaps we should say it took only half a day to arrive. In dream, the spaces between event and event are full of darkness. Only the departed can tell us how to journey through them. One does not ask what causes the skin of the chameleon to change. There are some mysteries which it is good to hide from the eye."
>
> "How long did it take you to return? Was the journey forward the same as the journey back? Did you lose your way on returning as you did going?" the first woman asked. She clapped her hands emphatically, her ivory earings visible in the dark.
>
> "Only the crab knows its own journey, if it is going forward or backward." (7-8)

The dream unravels gradually as the trader rather grudgingly replies to the questions put to her by her two companions. The conversation between the three women is characterized by a language that is double-voiced and that subverts the traditional category of co-operative story-telling. The content of the dream is particular in the way it establishes Nehanda as truly a gift from the ancestors. This happens as the questioning women appear to be satisfied that the words (of wisdom) coming from the trader's mouth are signifiers of a special intervention of the spirits in the birth of the child. More importantly, it enacts a connection between the reason and the fact of Nehanda's birth. Vera's positioning of this conversation at this stage of the narrative is significant. It is an attempt to alert the reader to the fact that it is because colonial invaders arrived in the land that Nehanda's birth became a necessity.

Because of her special nature, Nehanda is endowed with supernatural gifts. She sees what others cannot see and does things that others cannot do. She sees the black crows in the sky or vultures (a metaphor for the settlers) and can watch the village celebration at the *dare* or gathering place from her mother's hut: 'If Mother had the gift of sight, she would see her daughter in the clouds of dust that the men raise around them. Mother

thinks her in the hut. Nehanda sees all the activities, and dances on the shoulders of the best dancers among those gathered' (33). The reader learns that when she touches the beetle, 'she wails until she brings herself to deafness, until she has closed out the earthly sounds that try to penetrate and disturb her silence' (34). And yet 'nothing can be heard from her' (34). No one but she can even see that 'the spirits perform prophetic dances on the ground before her, and send deafening echoes through the ground' (34). Undisturbed by her physical surroundings she waits in desperation for the spirit world to establish contact with her. Her sense of expectancy is captured in the following passage:

> No words come out of her mouth in desperation. She rocks back and forth, but no one hears her invocation. She speaks with the guidance of the departed which shape her tongue into words. Words grow like grass from her tongue. Nehanda waits in the darkness for the masked presence that will tell her of the long night that has been sent to the earth, and of the moon that sits rotting in the heavens. (36)

Images of darkness and night recur quite frequently in the text to symbolize the period of enslavement and domination that followed the colonial invasion. Nehanda's ability to see her people from the vantage point of the spirit world enables her to see what this long period of domination has done to her people:

> The light of the heavens has been stolen from the eyes of her people, and only the fire gives them warmth, when they can once again find each other's faces. Only the scarred faces of her people tell them they have been in the battle. They are shocked at this transformation of their bodies because they cannot remember the call of battle. On which plateau has the battle been fought, and against which adversary? Surely they have not fought one another?
>
> The distances are now hidden by the darkness, and they cannot see into the future, or into the past. They are trapped in the moment of their abandonment. (36)

There is an implicit reference in this passage to forced labour under a harsh colonial rule, as suggested in the phrases 'scarred faces' and 'transformations of their bodies'. Obviously

the absence of remembrance - which presumably hinders the people's search for their lost identity - as well as their lack of foresight is also attributed to 'the darkness' that has fallen on the land. The following passage, which records a conversation between Nehanda and the spirits who 'reveal ... distances to her spirit' (37), reinforces the notion that colonial domination has lasted too long and suggests that it has been facilitated by the trickery of imperial discourse :

> "Indeed it is dark, but it has been dark for a long time. We are in the season of night. It has been night since morning. The sun has vanished from the sky. We bear the marks of the moon on our faces."
> "Something has passed over our heads. Beware of trickery. Yes, some trickery is in the blindness rendered through words. Beware of blinding words!" (37)

By describing Nehanda as one who is inspired by the ancestors of the nation, who is able to understand her people's predicament and who possesses vision, Vera effectively constructs her as a symbol of the nation. In the narrative, Nehanda is indeed positioned at the centre of the confrontation between darkness (colonial domination) and its antithesis, 'light from the heavens' (cultural identity) which needs to be retrieved. This construction of Nehanda as medium *cum* resistance leader effects a 'spiritual' marginalization of the settlers and justifies Anthony Chennells's (1995:13) assertion that the uprising in Vera's text 'is not primarily a resistance of battle but grounded on some other plane of being and cognition to which the whites have no access'. Claiming this ontological ground is precisely Vera's way of affirming difference and unsettling the settler's discursive space alluded to by Chennells (see Chapter One). Vera herself has implicitly acknowledged this aspect of her text by describing it as a 'mythical work' depicting a 'mystical world' (John Vekris, 1997:10).

PART TWO

The following extract from the trader woman's dream provides an apt starting-point for considering Vera's inscription of the settler in her text, because while it implies the inaccessibility for the whites of the African system of knowledges alluded to by Chennells, it also casts the invader as a danger to the nation.

> ... We were indeed surprised by what we saw. We thought our eyes had abandoned us. Make me remember, was it not said by the late chief that our kindness would be our death?"
>
> "You met the symbol of death on your *journey's path*? Is that what you saw? Did something cross your path then?" The two women swallowed more distance between themselves and the story-teller. They now sat very close together.
>
> "If it had crossed our path and passed, we would have been satisfied, and cleansed ourselves in the river. That is not what chanced. We saw the sign, but the sign had decided to remain among us."
>
> "Was it a sign? What did it see? Here we stand in the middle of the river. Tell us what you witnessed."
>
> ...
>
> "The sign was in the form of a human being. A stranger, but a human nevertheless." ...
>
> "Did the stranger walk on two legs? For how else does a *stranger* become a sign? Did he walk on two feet? or on four? Did he walk forward or backward?"
>
> "The stranger had decided to stay. Did you not hear me tell you of it? We discovered that the stranger had decided to stay among us. The stranger became a sign of our future. What does it mean to have *a stranger, with unknown customs*, live among you? To live I say, not to visit?"
>
> "That is indeed a sign." (10-11) [emphasis mine]

According to Edward Said (1993), the journey as a central trope is typical of imperial narratives about the non-European world. He argues that the deployment of this trope is a literary means of suggesting, as in the case of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the 'colonial trajectory' and a 'reclamation of the fictive territory' (1993:212). This latter is undermined, in the extract chosen, through the participatory nature of the story-telling

process. The imaginative immersion - 'Here we stand in the middle of the river' - suggests this reclamation. Its broader frame of reference is, of course, the implicit comment being made about the construction of the nation through the evocation of the communal ethos. In a somewhat different but complementary way, Eric Savoy (1990:294) associates the journey trope in imperial narratives with 'a self-conscious examination of the impulses to interrogate and interpret the unreadable "text" of the Other, and the defensive, pseudo-interpretive articulations against the unreadable'. Considering the context of *Nehanda*, and taking account of Maggi's point that dreams in African literature could have particular meanings, the trader's dream appears to provide a deconstructive reading of the journey motif in colonial narratives. This appears so in view of the fact that the dream entails a return and an encounter with the stranger. The passage suggests that, in this case, it is the native rather than the Western traveller and so-called explorer who tries and interpret the unreadable 'text' of the Other. Interestingly, the roles are reversed here, with the native in the role of the Self and the stranger becoming the Other. The question 'What does it mean to have a stranger, with unknown customs, live among us? To live I say, not to visit?' constitutes the terms in which this interrogation is articulated. With this reversal of roles, Vera underlines the concept that the invasion of the land by the stranger constitutes a cause for concern about the danger it poses to the nature of communication between the departed and the living.

In this respect, Vera's interrogation of the stranger's presence reminds one of Fanon (1968:31) who states that '[in] defiance of his successful transplantation, in spite of his appropriation, the settler still remains a foreigner...', a point that appears to justify Vera's resignation of the settler as a stranger. Her use of this term is also significant in light of

the distinction Nikos Papastergiadis (1996:180), writing in another context, makes between the notions of outsider and the stranger:

> The identity of the outsider carries with it an a priori exclusion: a relation of non-relation. Whereas the stranger possesses an identity which is internalizable but unlocatable. The outsider's identity is one of non-identity, an intranscendable stigma, whereas the ambiguity of the stranger's identity has the potential to blur the categories of identification.

The above observation illuminates the inscription of the settler in Vera's text for it combines both notions. To the native, the invader represents both the stranger and the outsider (as suggested in Said's argument about the importance of locality in resistance narratives, quoted earlier). In this sense, the above quote also helps the reader to see that the notion of the stranger as used in Vera's text becomes a site for the native to confront his or her own identity. Unable to locate the identity of the colonial invader and refusing to identify with him, the native eventually resorts to war as a means of erasing this ambiguity and of regaining control of the discursive space. There is another dimension, not emphasized in the novel, to the way the native confronts his or her identity: that is the ironical fact that the Shonas are not the first occupants of the land they reclaim as theirs.

This construction of the colonial invasion as a metaphor for cultural lethargy in traditional African societies is a device that Ayi Kwei Armah also uses in his novel *Two Thousand Seasons* (1978), which explores the internal and external disruptions of what Armah's communal narrator calls the 'living way' of the black race as a consequence of foreign - European and Arab - invasions. Armah's communal narrator is much given to the repetition of such words as 'ostentatious cripples', 'killers', 'enslavers', 'predatory tormentors', 'conquerors', 'devotees of death', 'attackers', 'enslavers', and 'slaughterers' to characterize

the invaders and to the use of lexical items with positive loading such as 'thinkers', 'remembers', 'seers' and 'utterers' to suggest an African rationality (the 'way'), that contrasts with the 'white disease'. Vera, in contrast, is less inclined to use terms with negative loading to refer to the invaders. Her strategy is to let her readers draw their own conclusions. Both Armah and Vera, however, are concerned about the impact of colonial invasions on African people and traditional ways of life. Armah sees colonialism, which he also refers to as the 'white road', as a source of the destruction of the African way of living. In his opinion, the European way of living or culture carries within it the seed of destruction of the African culture. Similarly, Vera identifies the coming of the Europeans as a symbol of death. In her text, she highlights the undesirability of the European presence in the land because of the pernicious effect 'unknown customs' might have on indigenous people. For these reasons, both writers' novels emphasize the necessity of fighting the invaders and rejecting their world-views.

Vera identifies, through the trader's dream, the stranger's motives in a way that is also reminiscent of Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons*, a text in which the 'white man from the sea' is depicted as chiefly interested in capitalist exploitation of the land. Isanusi, the wise councillor who is portrayed as a keeper and defender of the 'way', presents to the nation on behalf of the greedy king Koranche a list of the invaders' demands, which include a total franchise for the exploitation of natural and mineral resources, in return for trinkets given to the king and his courtiers. In *Nehanda*, land and its natural and mineral resources also figure prominently as the reasons why the strangers want to stay. In a scene reminiscent of Isanusi's presentation of the settlers' demands, Ibwe reports to the village

audience at the village square that the settlers have suggested that the natives let them exploit the soil in return for protection and the benefits of civilization.

In the following extract in which the woman trader tells how the stranger in her dream set out to occupy the land, the stranger's motive is identified as commercial exploitation:

> He had built a home.... He had taken many cattle away from us. He had moved us away into the barren part of our land where crops would not grow. Many people were killed by the stranger. When we saw his arrival we gave him pieces of gold, and he gave us that which he had brought from his own land. What we saw on that hill tied our mouths, and we left in silence. (11)

Building a house on the top of a hill is an act of claiming possession of the entire land surrounding the hill. The trader woman and her companion's surprise and astonishment convey their deep conviction that there was a grim plan behind the stranger's arrival in their land. This implication does not go unnoticed by the two women in the room who comment: 'A visitor to a strange land must be humble enough not to choose the highest ground in the land to build his home' (12). Thus, seen in the general context of the story, the trader's dream serves to set the scene for the resistance struggle in which Nehanda plays a leading role.

The commercial dimension of colonial conquest is also stressed in the following remarks contained in Vatete's tale:

> We were certain that they had come for gold... . The strangers cared only for the wealth of the forest ... (24)

However, Vatete's story, which describes the encounter with the strangers at the base of the sacred big tree of rain, also appears to validate Chennells's (1995:13) view that the

uprising narrated in the novel is mainly motivated by the 'spiritual assault' associated with the settler's presence in the land. The journey to the tree of rain is made in order to appease the ancestors so that there can be rain. Vatete tells the child Nehanda: 'For four days we were supposed to leave food at the foot of the tree. We were there to worship and praise our great ancestors so that we could have rain.' (22) The big, sacred tree, which 'was older than anyone in the village' (22) is the home of the rain spirit. As Vatete emphasizes, 'only those who had been chosen by the great spirit that we prayed to could be allowed inside' (22). As the villagers reach the big tree they are met with the sight of strangers desecrating this holy site. For at the base of the tree, these people are not only eating the food that they have cooked but they are also digging the ground around the tree in search of gold. These acts of desecration bemuse the villagers who consider them to be offensive to their ancestors: 'We had never seen such desecration' (23). And Vatete goes on to lament in the following terms:

> It is a hard thing to see strangers on your land. It is even harder to find a stranger dancing on your sacred ground. What mouth can carry a sight such as that?.... We were afraid of our ancestors who had been offended. (23)

Through Vatete's story Vera introduces the notion that the stranger's presence in the land may not be as temporary as it appears. Consider this exchange between the child Nehanda and Vatete:

> "Why did the strangers stay then, if they could not find what they wanted? Why did they stay if they failed to find gold?"
>
> "Often we say that the mouth is like a wounded tree, it will heal itself. But there were no answers to satisfy our asking. The stranger had come to us on a long journey, and his kin had forgotten him." (24)

The conquest motif is central in both the midwife Vatete's stories and Nehanda's mother's dreams. Vatete's story about the child who was abducted by strangers and put in a goatskin bag, but who managed to free herself by singing a traditional song that 'put them to sleep' and 'by chewing off the skin of the bag' is rightly described by Jones (1997:52) as a foreboding tale. 'This foreboding', he states, 'is realized in the clash heralded by the arrival of Browning and Smith', interesting in its fairly obvious literary allusion to *Things Fall Apart* with the early missionaries Brown and Smith, now become an archetypical name choice. Given the context of the novel, it is clear that the abducted girl symbolizes Zimbabwe. The singing of the traditional song her mother taught her is a clear reference to the cultural legacy of the ancestors and the chewing off of the skin of the bag, a clear reference to the liberation struggle. Through the metaphors interspersed in the narrative of this dream Vera forces the reader to see that it is possible for a nation to regain control of its destiny by resorting to the resources of its cultural heritage. The foreboding Jones refers to is also encapsulated by Nehanda's mother's dream the night before her daughter's naming ceremony. In the dream, the mother sees herself running desperately through a rain of feathers 'surrounded by mysteries' to try and find her lost child. To the mother, this dream is a bad omen for her daughter's future. It looks as if Vera's narrator duplicates the same plot device to make the point that the presence of foreigners in the land heralds chaos. It also seems consistent with the general thrust of the novel that the rain of black feathers symbolizes the colonial conquest of the land, which will affect the destiny of her child. This view is confirmed in the following narratorial comment:

> Mother sees the birds fly off the trees and disappear into the shadows of the tall anthills. Mother is very afraid for her daughter, whom she feels will not be with her long. (20-21)

Significantly, both Mother's dream and Vatete's story incorporate the abduction in their plots. They revolve around the abduction of a child. These two stories complete each other, considering that the silence in Mother's dream about the perpetrators of the abduction is filled in Vatete's tale where the strangers are identified as the culprits.

The notion introduced in Vatete's reply, that the stranger is on a long journey which may have severed his ties with his native land, is important in this passage. It was mentioned earlier that, according to Said, the journey as a central trope is typical of imperial narratives about the non-European world. It is clear from the above passage that here again, through Vatete's story, Vera deconstructs the journey motif in colonial narratives. Notice how her narrator presents the stranger's journey in contrast to the villagers' relatively short journey to the tree of rain - four days of sacrifice and then the return home. This notion is ambiguous in that, while it establishes the fact that, because of his extremely long journey from home, the stranger no longer belongs to his place of origin, it also raises the question of what course of action to take, given the danger his permanent presence in the land would present to the villagers' traditional way of life. In light of this latter interpretation, Vatete's words can be interpreted as a call for resistance. There is some optimism, though, at the end of this essentially sad story, which is suggested by the image of the millipede. Despite the fact that the ancestors had been offended by the presence of the strangers, which resulted in a more severe drought in the land, an unexpected thing happened:

> We did not dream, because we had no sight with which to feed our dreams. Then a millipede moved across the earth, though there had been no rain. In the black sand, it left a soft trail that led behind a rock. (25)

There is a clear suggestion in this passage that even in times of serious difficulties some extraordinary happenings may occur. The millipede moving to the tree of rain serves as a metaphor for an agent of change. The metaphor clearly points to Nehanda. The analogy with Nehanda is also implied in Vatete's phrase 'black sand', which can be read as referring to Zimbabwe. Thus the end of this story suggests the possibility of an intervention of the spirits in the liberation struggle, which is what the rest of this novel is about. All these narratives - dreams and 'real stories' - that Vera has intertwined in her main plot contain signals about the nature of the foreign invasion and the intentions of the colonists, and about the role Nehanda is cast to play for the liberation of her land.

It has been shown that colonial presence is suggested in terms that reveal a complete rejection of a multicultural politics of nation-formation. The image of the settler as a vulture in the dreams, and of colonial invasion as darkness, would have been recognized by the reader as important in this novel. The transformation Vera has made from crow to vulture somehow complicates her construction of the colonial invader, considering that the crow and the vulture are scavengers rather than birds of prey, which is what she means the settler to symbolize. As the narrative proceeds, related images are used in Nehanda's speech to underscore the disruption of the life of her nation by the fact of this unwholesome presence.

After the council held at the *dare* during which discussion concentrates on the white men's refusal of the elders' injunction that they should leave the land, it becomes clear that the conflict between the colonists and the indigenous people is inevitable. The latter's reactions to the village spokesman Ibwe's replaying of the meeting between the colonial

administrator and the village elders indicate well how the positions between the colonized and the colonizer are revealed to be irreconcilable. The members of the community support their elders' rejection of the white man's offer of guns and invitation to join in his religion. They are horrified at the white man's suggestion that the chief signs an act of allegiance to his Queen. The frustrated comment made by one person in the crowd that '[t]he white man will not leave this land willingly' (39) and the question repeatedly asked by another 'For how many moons will the stranger be among us?' (42, 43 and 44) capture the natives' anger caused by the presence of the white man.

The scene then shifts away from the *dare* to Mr Browning's house. Here Vera provides the reader with an additional dimension of the divide between the settlers and the natives. The misunderstanding between Mr Browning, the colonial administrator, and his houseboy Mashoko, dramatized through their thoughts, is portrayed as emblematic of the tension between the two groups. Mashoko does not understand why Mr Browning has renamed him Moses. Browning reasons that the 'new name is easier to remember and, more importantly, it is a step toward the goal of civilizing the country' (44). The narrator interprets the misunderstanding in terms of the cultural difference between the groups to which the two men belong: 'Like the embryonic garden outside Mr Browning's window, the name creates a space in which Mr Browning can feel comfortable' (44). But the point is also that civilization and the white man's religion are seen as synonymous. With this episode Vera's narrator suggests the loss of African cultural identity as a consequence of colonization. The two men also have differing views on Mashoko' s work. Being in the service of Mr Browning is felt by Mashoko as an humiliating experience whereas to Mr Browning the work ennobles Moses.

Vera's treatment of this scene is interesting in the way it recalls that of Guillaume Oyono in his anticolonial novel *Houseboy* (1990). In his discussion of the novel, Christopher Miller (1993) reads the evolving relationship between the houseboy Toundi and his master, the French administrative commandant, as informed by what he refers to, after Homi Bhabha (1994), as 'the politics of the glance' . As he explains: 'From Sartre to Foucauld and Homi Bhabha, the power to look and see has been recognized as a crucial sign of *colonial* control and resistance' (Miller, 1993:78). Referring clearly to what Bhabha (1994b:76) has termed the '*surveillance* of colonial power as functioning in relation to the regime of the *scopic drive*', what strikes Miller in *Houseboy* is that Toundi and the French commandant 'glare at each other according to an elaborate system of hierarchies and taboos, a system that is taken apart and laid waste by the novel' (1993:78). As Miller explains, Oyono's novel starts with the colonizer having the upper hand in all the glances, looks, and stares exchanged by Toundi and him and then the reader witnesses a weakening of the commandant's glance. This, Miller argues, reveals that 'Oyono's treatment of the glance amounts to a fairly explicit demonstration of anti-colonial resistance on a small scale, the reversal of explicit power relations' (81).

In the scene between Mashoko and Mr Browning Vera dramatizes this aspect of anti-colonial resistance in much the same way. Consider, for instance, the passage below which describes Mashoko' s attending to Mr Browning when the latter is washing:

> While Moses stands very stiffly in the centre of the room, Mr Browning dips the soap into the water and proceeds to wash his face. Some of the soapy water splashes onto Moses's uniform; and he will have to change it. Moses closes his eyes against the droplets, but does not move.. He keeps his eyes closed until Mr Browning has stopped splashing. "You can open your eyes now, Moses,"

> Mr Browning says. What a fool Moses is, a real clown. He wonders what his wife will think of Moses. His habits are embarrassing.
>
> What a fool Mr Browning is, Mashoko thinks .... Having completed his inspection of the garden , Mr Browning re-enters the house. His eyes are wrinkled, and small moist patches have already appeared below each of his armpits; later, a much larger one will spread across his back. Mashoko tries to avoid looking at him. (44-5)

In terms of the postcolonial 'politics of the glance' Miller refers to, it is clear that through this scene Vera successfully inscribes the colonizer as holding the balance of power at the beginning of the uprising. Vera depicts him as the one who dictates the terms of the relationships. At the same time the colonizer's apparent control is undercut by an internal mode of resistance that expresses itself not through the looks but in thoughts. Mashoko cannot face Mr Browning because he does not feel confident enough to do so, even though he is sure to have the last word as suggested by the reference to a larger patch on Browning' s back. Not surprisingly, when later in the story he comes to announce his departure, he is in control. 'Mr Browning had been surprised to see him wearing his traditional clothes. He carried his shield under his arm' (74). The traditional apparel and the arm symbolize national identity and resistance, respectively. Jones (1997:52) correctly reads this scene as indicating 'the liberation of the spirit of the people'. It is significant that, when Mashoko reappears in the novel, he joins the crowds which are listening to the rebel leader Kaguvi. The text suggests that his purpose in joining the rebellion is in order to settle his personal account with the colonizers: 'He dances to the crowds, affirming the truth that has been spoken, shedding the humiliation he has suffered since the arrival of the white men' (73). In this episode Mashoko is made to represent his nation for it is the entire nation that, the text suggests, has suffered from the presence of the settlers.

The colonizer's voice, though less loud here than in Eppel's *The Great North Road*, is also heard in the novel through Mr Browning and his assistant Mr Smith. Despite their mutual dislike on a personal level, the two men share a strong commitment to the empire and to the colonization of Africa. In a scene in the novel, the two men exchange views on Africa and its inhabitants. It is not surprising that their conversation is cast in a language which recent postcolonial theories have identified as the colonial discourse. Such a discourse is crystallized in several utterances in the conversation. A short selection (which has been given letters for the purpose of easy reference) is given below:

A "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."
"Surely, the Africans know the land..." Mr Smith answers dispassionately. (52)

B I mean the knowledge of the world that we have. We have drawn maps,and know how to locate ourselves on the globe. The native only knows where he is standing. I have been collecting maps since I was a boy. This is what we should teach at the new school, a knowledge of the earth. (52).

C The African must begin to go somewhere. He must be given a goal in the future. (53)

D I sometimes wonder why I have stayed in Africa so long, although it is a fairly appealing place. One can easily stand outside things... (53)

E ... I value my freedom. Freedom emanates from nature itself. It is the charm of Africa that ideals coincide so perfectly with nature. (53)

F It seems natural to keep one's eyes focused on the distance in Africa.... The landscape appears monotonous since the horizon is always before one's eyes, without any distracting landmarks to obscure vision. The foreigner in Africa is always in a state of waiting; the horizon turns one into a dreamer. (53)

G I shall introduce order and culture," Mr Browning says... . We should enlarge the prison... . We need order and justice. (55)

H "It is hard to deal in a civilized manner with people who possess so many superstitions." The urgency of introducing the Bible in Africa had never been more clear to Mr Browning. (75)

I The only certain thing is never to trust the native, no matter how well behaved they seem. They are the most dishonest race on the face of the earth. (76)

J They are unaccustomed to work, these natives, that is why they are fighting us. They prefer to sit in the sun all day, than to be brought under the most advanced civilization in the world. (76)

K Only the rifles will Christianize the natives.... (77)

The extracts above can be grouped into two categories. First, there are those that relate to the space (Africa) and, second, those that relate to its inhabitants. In his book *The Rhetoric of Empire* already referred to, Spurr explains the question of appropriation of space and people in colonial discourse. In his view, it is not only land and its resources that the colonizing imagination appropriates but also the indigenous people and the native point of view. He observes that 'the colonizing imagination takes for granted that the land and its resources belong to those who are best able to exploit them according to the values of a Western commercial and industrial system' (Spurr, 1993:31). The appropriation of the land is present in the text in the form of the settlers' presence in the land and their stated desire to continue to rule, as expressed in response to the village elders' requests that they should leave the land.

Statements D, E, and F about the African landscape reflect the view in colonial discourse of the continent as pristine and inviting conquest. As Spurr (1993:30) states in his book, 'the European experience in Africa allows for the nostalgic pastoralism to be projected onto the future and made into the object of utopian desire. This utopian vision imposes an entire

series of European institutions on the natural landscape'. The absence of 'any distracting landmarks to obscure the vision' in statement G above calls for the need to take possession of the uncultured land and to endow it with symbols of civilization, such as churches, schools, and prisons, which is the idea that is implied in statements B, G, and H. Statements A, B and C are rooted in assumptions in colonial discourse that Africans have no culture and that it is in their best interests to allow themselves to be ruled by a superior culture. Such a discourse, according to Bhabha (1994b:70), assumes 'a form of governmentality that in marking out a 'subject nation', appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activities'. Statements I , J and K illustrate stereotypes circulated in colonial discourse that serve to perpetuate the myth of the inferiority of the black race, which the work of Bhabha, Fanon, Said and other postcolonial theorists has shown to characterize colonial discourse. All these utterances reveal the polarization in Vera's text of two conceptions of land: the colonists' and the natives', which can be justifiably be regarded as the *causa belli* in this story. Thus, given the context of the novel, it seems justifiable to see in this representation of the colonist's voice Vera's strategy of exposing the presumptions of the hegemonic settler discourse, well brought into relief in the colonial discourse Duiker Berry articulates in *The Great North Road*, and her strategy of highlighting the irreconcilable nature of the two positions: the settlers' and the natives'.

Nehanda's transformation into a prophetess and a war leader coincides with the mounting opposition to the settlers' presence. Her strange behaviour, which is noted by the villagers and which is characterized by her refusal to speak and to eat, forces her mother to consult a *n'anga* or traditional healer. After consultation the *n'anga* declares Nehanda to be on the point of being inhabited by a good spirit. This diagnosis is consistent with the point David

Lan makes in his book *Guns & Rain* (1985) about the only reason why, according to Shona beliefs, the departed might make a descendant ill. As he puts it, 'This is to give a sign that they wish to possess her or him, to speak through her or his mouth to all their descendants to warn that some disaster is about to strike or to complain that they have been forgotten and ask that beer be brewed or a child be named in their memory' (32). Soon after the *n'anga*'s consultation, Nehanda starts prophesying. It then becomes clear that her voice is no longer her own but that of the ancestors of the land. The text validates this interpretation as the following passage suggests:

> She stays in the darkness of the cave, and speaks to the people from within, out of their sight. Her voice is that of the departed. It comes from the beginning of time. The people stand at the cave, calling, asking her to pass the voices of the departed.The voice comes from within them, from the cave, from below the earth and from the roots of trees The voice awakens the dead part of themselves, and they walk with new beliefs, with renewed wisdom. (81)

It also comes as no surprise that Nehanda's message to the nation is a call to take arms against the settlers. She indicates who the enemy is by pointing to the hill where the first settler was spotted.

PART THREE

Much of the politics of representation of the nation in Vera's text is deployed through Nehanda's voice. In the following extract, Vera has Nehanda use the image of a valley to portray the space of the nation:

> Here in this desperate valley where the grass was once green I hear the birth of voices. It is hard and convulsive, like other births. The green valley is a place that holds hope and warmth. At the bottom of the hill, and then at the summit of the hill, not only would I see the wonders and trials of a past time, but even I would be transformed. (59)

The image of the green valley implies a picture of pre-colonial Zimbabwe as an Edenic place, a place of hope and warmth. This romantic image is contrasted with that of a dry valley, which symbolizes the country under colonial rule. This imaginary representation of Zimbabwe is appropriate as it relates to the geographical reality of the country. David Lan (1985) in his chapter entitled 'the People and the Land' characterizes Zimbabwe as essentially consisting of a valley and a plateau. In the above passage there is also a reference to a difficult 'birth of voices', which the narrator associates with the prophecies that Nehanda is about to make. The 'birth of voices' forces a recollection of the circumstances of Nehanda's own birth and is perhaps also a pointer to the birth of the Zimbabwean nation that this narrative implicitly celebrates. (This point is dealt with in some detail later on when this chapter discusses the gendering of the nation in this novel.) Notice also the repetition of the word 'hill' in the passage ('the bottom of the hill' and 'the summit of the hill'), which may be seen as emphasizing the natives' righful ownership of their territory. This interpretation appears to be validated by the association of these places with the 'wonders and trials of a past time'.

Vera further establishes the contrast between precolonial and colonial Zimbabwe by analogizing colonization with drought. In the passage below Edenic landscape imagery (represented by 'mountains', 'rivulets', and 'small lake'), describing precolonial Zimbabwe, exists side by side with a vocabulary denoting death, here represented by the terms 'dry', 'no longer green with birth' and 'grief' reinforcing the 'desperate valley' above:

> The valley was spacious and surrounded by mountains covered with lush grass. From the mountains, rivulets flowed filling a small lake in the fertile valley in which fishes of various kinds swam. The valley, however, is no longer green with birth. Its grass is dry, and the sediment of memory swallows boulders of grief. (60)

This image of colonial Zimbabwe is completed with reference to the settlers, symbolized in the novel by the vultures who dominate the landscape. At some point in the narrative, Nehanda declares: 'I see vultures! ...There are vultures in the air !' (60). By this image of the vultures, the reader is made to recall the black birds and black feathers in Mother's and Nehanda's dreams mentioned earlier. It reveals a constant emphasis on the settlers' presence as the origin of the nation's misery. Because vultures are associated with death and corpses, the image serves to represent the land as a place of death, and possibly as a battlefield. There is also a suggestion in the text that, because of the digging for gold, the land has lost its naturalness and the soil its fertility: 'We have dug dead roots from the thirsting soil, tubers that mock us with fists of dry rot, the forest in which we have hunted has become a land of diggers. The ground echoes, echoes' (62).

Once she has constructed this picture of the occupied homeland, Nehanda chronicles the nation's passive coexistence with the settlers. She mentions the fact that the nation was not prepared for the long settler presence and for the invasion of the land that ensued. As the voice of the ancestors, she laments the fact that the nation rather unwisely extended a hand of hospitality to people whose intention was to appropriate the land and to divert the nation's attention from the ancestors. Stressing that the time has come to recover their lost identity and to reclaim 'their' land, she petitions the nation to carry out the ancestor's command:

> I am among you. I carry the message of retribution. The land must be cleansed with your blood. You must fight for what belongs to you, and for your departed. I will speak until the birds depart from the trees. (61)

That Nehanda carries a message of retribution is consistent with the thrust of the novel in which the colonial conquest is construed as a grave injustice done to the native and his/her culture. The simile of the black birds on the trees which repeatedly occurs in Nehanda's monologue serves precisely to inscribe the invasion in terms that negate a link between the settler and the land. (Significantly, Nehanda is associated with *Shirichena* or the bird of light.) In the monologue the scavengers (a metaphor for the settlers, as already indicated) are portrayed as different from the natives: 'From the tree flew predictions in the form of birds that we had never seen before' (63). The difference between them and the natives consists also in the fact that the settlers occupy a space (trees) where the natives would not feel comfortable. (This statement further points to the whites' marginalization, suggested in Chennells's remark alluded to earlier.) It is a space that is metaphorically the settlers', because of its association with imperial conquest. Even their discourse is presented as different from the natives: 'Voices sit on the branchless trees and call out to us with a multitude of sounds that have travelled long distances through the heated air' (63). Finally, the lasting effect of the birds' presence is presented as detrimental to the nation, not only because 'Our trees no longer bore fruit, and we dug the earth fruitlessly' (65), a reference to moral and cultural drought, but also because it severed communication with the ancestors.

It seems that, with these metaphors, Vera disrupts the notion of cultural hybridity celebrated by postcolonial theorists and favours that of cultural homogeneity. The type of nationalist discourse conveyed through them repulses hybridity, which it considers as pernicious to indigenous culture because of its potential to dilute cultural purity. This is why, in order to impress even further upon the nation the ideology of cultural nationalism,

Nehanda reminds her people that there is no greater urgency than to claim what is theirs and to rid the land of that which enslaves the people physically as well as spiritually. Hence her exhortations:

> "Rise up, I say. Rise up and fight.' (66)

And:

> Spread yourselves through the forest and fight till the stranger decides to leave. Let us fight till the battle is decided. Is death not better than submission? There is no future till we have regained our lands and our birth. There is only this moment, and we have to fight till we have redeemed ourselves. What is today's work on this land if tomorrow we have to move to a new land? Perhaps we should no longer bury our dead. (66)

As should become clear by now, Nehanda represents the spiritual arm of the *Chimurenga*. It is her role as one that unlocks the nation's conscience and provides it with the moral strength that sustains it on the battleground, that Vera's novel highlights in its representation of the nation. In this way, the natives appear as a nation awakening from a long night of cultural limbo. It is to Kaguvi, however, that the task of leading the nation on the battle ground falls. By reclaiming the legendary figures Nehanda and Kaguvi as heroes in a national liberation war fought to reclaim land and cultural identity, Vera's novel enacts a revision of the pioneer origin myth. The focus on these mythical figures is also significant because it enables Vera not only to inscribe the liberation fighter as a signifier of national identity and the war as a national cause but also, in the words of Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (1996:116), to 'loosen imperialism's stronghold on historical representation'. Ironically, of course, the argument of the novel turns on an even older myth: that of Adamastor, the legendary spirit of Africa residing in Table Mountain in the Cape of Good Hope, biding its time before repossessing the land.

Kaguvi's inscription as a national hero deserves some consideration. His first appearance in the text constructs him as occupying an important spiritual space, comparable with Nehanda's, as can be seen from the following passage:

> A small wind climbs the hill and meets her on her descent, but does not turn away from it. In the hills she has traversed with the message of her cry, another wind rises, loud and captivating: the hunter Kaguvi. (70)

The reader also learns that 'When Kaguvi arrives at a village, it is as though he has emerged from the horizon' (70). In the context of the 'dancers' 'waiting for the past' (68) and '[seeking] the beginning of the world' (68) the emergence of Kaguvi - metaphorized as the 'wind' - is deeply allusive: he is, at once, primeval man and harbinger of the future of the nation. However, even as the novel functions to represent him as endowed with some magical power, it does not grant Kaguvi and Nehanda equal status. Unlike Nehanda whose authority derives from the departed themselves, Kaguvi, the text tells us, 'is humble and beseeching before the people, who are the only ones with the power to grant him authority over their future' (71). Furthermore, his success on the battleground depends on the only person through whom the ancestors communicate with the rest of the nation: 'When he closes his eyes, the voice of Nehanda comes to Kaguvi. The voice gives him strength, and he works with it towards achieving the goals of the rebellion' (73). There is a sense in the second half of the novel that, by associating the struggle for liberation with the ancestors, Vera succeeds in legitimizing it as a just cause.

Kaguvi is depicted as a national hero. The novel insists on his physical attributes as it foregrounds his bravery in killing a bull with a spear, in drinking its blood and in eating its heart. The belief that a warrior who drinks the blood and eats the heart of a bull killed this

way inherits the bull's strength is part of the Shona myth of bravery. Kaguvi' s battle name is Gumboreshumba, which means 'Leg-of-the-lion' (71). The name suggests his belief that an enemy should be killed. This is confirmed by his fiery anti-settler discourse and by the traditional hunt he and his followers enact. The text tells us that as they enact the traditional war dance 'Kaguvi gazes longingly into the hills' (72). The hills Kaguvi looks into refer to the place which settlers occupied when they first came to the land, and thus symbolize the locus of colonial power. They also represent the lost cultural identity as Nehanda reminds the warriors: 'The past is in the hills' (80).

Kaguvi has more than just a passing association with the lion. The text says: 'His strength is preserved in a black skin bag which he carries on his back. No one has ever seen its contents: the claws of a lion' (72). According to Lan (1985:160), there is a strong association in traditional mythology between the lion and a royal ancestral spirit: 'When a royal ancestral spirit is not in the body of its medium, it lives in the body of a lion. If you kill a lion you take the chance of killing the temporary home of a royal ancestor.' This helps to explain why Kaguvi refers to himself as 'Leg-of-the-Lion'. The power of the lion, associated with Kaguvi, extends to the whole nation whose aspirations he articulates in his dancing:

> During his seances, the villagers live their lives. Kaguvi dances their hopes into being, dances their future and past triumphs, dances their histories, dances the forest that surrounds them, dances the hills and the plateaus, dances until the sounds of the birds become their own war-songs, dances until the strength of the lion is in their limbs. The flight of the eagle is the speed of their feet, the cry of the jackal surrounds them, and their spirits soar and they dream only of their success. (72)

As suggested by the passage above, Kaguvi' s dancing symbolizes the coming to life of a nation that, metaphorically, has been in a state of dormancy since the arrival of the settlers. The celebration of this recovery is artfully realized through the evocation of the past, present and future of the nation. Also, significantly, there is in this passage a repetition of the images of landscape and of scavenging birds which, as already discussed, Vera employs in the novel to allegorize the occupation of the homeland by invading foreign forces. The hope, that the goal of cleansing the nation will be achieved, is suggested in the closing sentence through a reference to the very qualities associated with the settlers.

Typically, Nehanda describes the success achieved during the uprising as the result of scrupulous observance of the ancestors' instructions. In the reports the warriors give to Nehanda of the battles they have fought, they speak of how they felt protected by the spirits throughout the war campaign:

> We moved through the midst of the strangers, and we were invisible. Look, we have come back whole, having achieved our aim. We have shot arrows through the air, and they have landed. Let it not be said that we did not fight, that we did not execute all the messages of the departed. Like the wind we have swept through the land, attacking every stranger on our path. Meanwhile they have attacked us with guns, but we have persisted. (78-79)

And also:

> The blood of our enemies now flows through the land. May the spirits protect us in this struggle. (79)

As the war spreads Nehanda warns the warriors against irresponsible acts that might only displease the spirits and therefore cost the nation its victory over its enemies. One such act is the taking of anything other than weapons that could later be used to crush the

strangers: 'Take only the things that will protect you, not the things that will destroy you' (79).

It is clear from the above that Vera establishes a close connection between the liberation of the land and the recovery of the cultural past. She sees them both as two sides of the same coin. Nehanda's warning to the warriors against coveting anything belonging to the strangers is consistent with the notion Vera develops in her novel that destruction comes with the giving up of one's cultural identity. This notion is made more explicit when Nehanda says: 'Approach the stranger with a single eye, the other should be blind. It is the envying eye that will destroy us, that will change us entirely. We can become stronger and whole if we believe in our traditions' (79). The connection Vera makes between recovery of land and that of cultural identity is also articulated in the following excerpt from Nehanda's speech in which she urges the fighters to carry on the struggle:

> This is our land given to us by the ancestors. Protect it with your blood. The gnarled roots of trees are brothers with the earth. This is the season of journeying to our origins, to the beginning of our beliefs, and of time. This is the season of planting new hope in the ground, and of weeping. This is the season of night, of locusts, and of long shadows that have banished the sun from the earth. (80)

This is in fact a statement of what the war, as dramatized in Vera's text, is all about. The representation of the liberation war as a sacrifice and as journey to the source of cultural identity is well encapsulated in the above extract. The war is inscribed in this novel as a sacrifice that is required to retain the geographical, as well as spiritual, territory inherited from the ancestors. The story told through Nehanda is a history of territorial dispossession and spiritual enslavement.

It is important to remember that the journey motif permeates this text. All the dreams and stories told by the main characters in the novel are stories of journeys - most of them unsuccessful - attempted toward a destination of some importance. The above extract from the novel makes it clear that each of these stories are about a journey of self-discovery. As the above extract also suggests, the journey to 'our origins' is made to correspond with 'a season of night', that is, the colonial period. The journey takes the traveller back to the precolonial period, a period that Vera appears to idealize. Thus in Vera's text the journey motif is both colonial and anticolonial. The question one can ask is whether this is a novel about the recovery of Zimbabwe's soul rather than Africa's. This question arises in large part because the metonyms 'season of night' and 'long shadows', used in contrast to 'sun', clearly refer to the European colonization of Africa. With these metonyms, Vera inverts the notion that colonization brought civilization to Africa. Later on in the text, she allegorizes the colonial presence in terms of drought that leaves the people 'in amazement along the dry bank of the river where we had gathered' (83). This drought, the narrator says through Nehanda's mouth,

> held no sign to remind us of the previous rain. There was no sign of the flood we witnessed. The sky was caked with mud, which held big boulders from a forgotten life: it had been a partner to our deception. (83)

This metaphor of the drought, which is conceived in the mythology of the people of the Zambezi valley as a sign of the ancestors' displeasure with their descendants, effectively serves to emphasize the importance of the war as a means of recovering land and reuniting the people with their ancestors.

To illustrate the notion that the uprising is a national cause, Vera's text dramatizes an incident in which native women and children are brutally massacred by a column of settlers. The slaughter is witnessed by a boy from his position in a tree. He first witnesses the arrival in the village of a group of people on horses. The text makes a point of stressing that the village is almost empty because all the men are in the hills fighting against the settlers, and that the boy spends much of his time in the *musasa* tree because there are no longer any cows in the village that he can look after. In this way the text draws attention to the negative consequences of the colonial presence for the society. The riders of the horses are settlers. From his position in the tree the boy witnesses the killing of his mother, aunt and sister as well as the burning of huts and killing of other villagers. Although the boy is lucky to escape, he has burns in his arms caused by the flames leaping through the hut of his parents, an experience that has changed him into another person and given him another purpose in life: 'He does not want to see the animals any more, but when he closes his eyes the animals are still there. But he no longer wants to die, and he does not die that year, or the next' (99).

The boy's mind now associates the horses with the settlers and the settlers themselves become associated with the enslavement and persecution of his people. His determination to stay alive may be read as responding to a longing to settle accounts with the white invaders. It seems that, by giving a detailed account of this incident, Vera's narrator seeks to invert colonialism's discourse about the savagery of the natives. This episode recalls Alexander Kanengoni's novel *When the Rainbird Cries* (1987), which provides an emblematic account of the massacre that occurs in a village during the war of liberation. But in Kanengoni's text, although this massacre is perpetrated by the Rhodesian soldiers,

the responsibility lies in the hands of incompetent liberation army leaders. Informing this novel is the notion that the goal of the liberation struggle was often dissonant with personal ambitions. This notion gathers force in the novel when it becomes clear that the two men responsible for the debacle are sentenced to death.

Vera's text highlights the risk for the nation of disconnecting the two aims of the war, that is, the liberation of the land and the recovery of the cultural past, through the construction in the last part of the novel of Kaguvi as a heroic warrior who succumbs to the temptation of a foreign religion. This occurs during his conversation with a priest in his prison cell after his capture. The priest tries to convert him to Christianity. The text presents Kaguvi's exposure to the white men's religion as a danger for his spirit, and by extension, for his nation's spirit. The state of self-doubt occasioned by this exposure is shown to have severed his link with his ancestors: 'His ancient spirit, which he now sees as something separate from himself, weighs sorrowfully on him. It is as though they now live in separate ages of time, himself in the present, his spirit departing further in the past. They move in both directions of time, and they will not find each other' (106-107). He is no longer protected by the lion, his ancestor. Although he dies a prisoner of the white man and thus preserves in the eyes of his people a heroic status for his part in the liberation war, he is deprived of a hero's welcome in the ancestors' world. In this sense, Vera's use of Kaguvi as a foil to Nehanda is an important device to suggest the fact that the settlers have invaded his very soul, a hyperbolic innuendo that serves to underline the horror of occupation. Kaguvi's end contrasts with Nehanda's death, which is shown to be the culmination of a perfect process of national liberation. After her capture, she surrenders nothing to the white man. She flatly disobeys Mr Browning's injunction to be converted.

'She dances against Mr Browning and his God, against these strangers who have taken the land, she dances the faces of her people, the betrayal of time, the growth of wisdom, the glory of their survival - a shadow moving on the wall' (116).

By contrast to Eppel's *The Great North Road* which presents the liberation war as a factor of national division, Vera's novel celebrates the war which is presented as a just uprising against colonial invaders. An especially clear instance of this celebration is in the account of the victorious battle between the people and the strangers in the hills. The victory is scored as the ambush laid in the hills results in the death of many settlers and horses as well as the capture of horses and weapons. This battle is described as involving people from all sectors of the society: men, women and children. This participation of all in the battle is meant to make the point that the war is truly a national enterprise. But despite their victories, there is a lingering realization among the people that they cannot sustain the war for long:

> Though they have survived this attack, it is clear to them that it will not be long before they too have to surrender with the rest of their people, and go back to their villages. If not, their kind will certainly perish from the earth through the guns of the white men. Their victories during this fight have been many, but not enough to ensure their safety. They will only be safe, if the white men leave the land. (88)

The fading confidence in the future, underscored by this passage, is made to correspond with the imminent capture of Nehanda by a search party, led by Mr Browning. In the account of Nehanda's attempt to escape her pursuers, Vera seems to imply that this reversal in fortune is a temporary situation. This is indicated by the narrator's comment that

> The spirit from which she is descended has passed on to her a seed which she has planted in the fertile ground. She has clutched it between her fingers for so long. She has been crossing boundaries into a sorrow born out of sacrifice. (92)

The seed in this passage symbolizes the cultural consciousness that, Vera suggests throughout her narrative, was lost as a result of the stranger's invasion of the land. The boundaries in the passage refer to the process of mediation between the ancestral spirits and the people, which involves journeying from one world to another.

In the final part of the novel Nehanda is portrayed as having voluntarily relinquished her supernatural powers. Her death is presented as a passage from a world to which she came to carry a message for her nation, to a world where the narrator wants us to believe that she belongs. It is not as a finality but as the real beginning of a new phase in the nation's history. This is what the text refers to as Nehanda's second birth, which takes place in the cave and consists in her banishing of her own shadow. As with her first birth, her second birth establishes her as a 'liminal' being. At the same time, notice how this second birth is contrasted with her first birth for it is presented as another transition from this world to that of the departed:

> There are no witnesses to her second birth, only the spirits that send elegies to those who have been sacrificed in the fight. She weeps until the stars break into the sky and bring the light back into her eyes, then she watches them dance across the sky, darting, skirting and exploding, giving birth to other stars, dying in perfect patterns in harmony with their moment of death, knowing that the darkness will vanish as another brightness comes into the sky and destroys them, but speeding themselves to that death, singing in their brief glory which is their triumphant moment, existing in harmony with the darkness that makes them burn. (92-93)

The above excerpt, reminiscent of the account of the death of the mythological phoenix, reveals Vera's strategy of 'doubleness', which she uses quite frequently in this novel. References to the stars can be decoded either in the literal sense or, as is probably the case here, as a metaphor for the ancestors. Through such images of the firmament used to describe Nehanda's transformation, the narrator projects a vision of independence for her nation. She does this by playing once again on the opposition between darkness and light as metaphors for colonization and liberation. Also suggesting this opposition is the imagery of birth and death: the birth of a new nation is shown to result from the death of the colonial enterprise, which Said (1993:271) sees as a Fanonian linguistic strategy. Notice also the satirical way her narrator implicitly refers to the settlers' 'brief glory' by associating it with 'the darkness that makes them burn'. Her narrator further stresses the significance of the war as a healing process for the nation by making it clear that Nehanda's legacy has a lasting effect on the nation:

> In each circle that she has woven, she sees the completion of something definite and unconquerable. Each circle is a word which will redeem the soil from the feet of strangers, a trap for those who dare follow her footsteps on the ground along the path to ancient wisdom. (93)

Thus, consistent with the general thrust of the narrative, the novel concludes with the notion that Nehanda's death is not synonymous with defeat. On the contrary, as the narrator reminds us,

> In the future, the whirlwind centre of the wind, which is also herself, has collapsed, but that is only the beginning of another dimension of time. The collapse of the wind, which is also of her own death, is also part of the beginning, and from the spiralling centre of the wind's superimposed circle another wind rises, larger and stronger. Hope for the nation is born out of the intensity of newly created memory. The suffusing light dispels all uncertainty, and the young move out of the darkness

> of their trepidation, into the glory of dawn. The trembling wind asserts its eternal fury, and it will not be dominated, or destroyed. (111)

In the above passage Vera's narrator resorts once again to metaphors of darkness and light to convey her vision of postcolonial Zimbabwe. The narrator envisions post-independence Zimbabwe as a utopian land of free people who are conscious of their cultural past. In order that such a future materialize, the text seems to insist, it must be infused with reverberations from the past; that is, it must take stock of the nation's cultural past. The passage confirms Barbara Harlow's characterization of the resistance narrative as a genre that 'analyzes the past, including the symbolic heritage, in order to open up the possibilities of the future' (1987:83). It is worth noting that the terms 'young' and 'newly' are used in the passage to suggest the idea of a new breed of Zimbabwean people. Implicit in this view is the concept of the liberated Zimbabwean nation as a new, regenerated nation and of Zimbabwe's national space as a new, green valley as articulated in the passage below:

> In the future the valley will once again regain its colour and its growth. It will bear new lives, which will be born out of the old. There will be a growth there, among the swinging branches, among the sheltering leaves. Her death, which is also birth, will weigh on those lives remaining to be lived. In the valley, where they have prayed all night for rain, is heard the beginning of a new language and a new speech. (112)

Semantically, the text suggests the renewal in the country by using words such as [regained] colour and growth, 'swinging branches', 'sheltering leaves' to describe the new appearance of the valley. It is pertinent that Vera has her narrator mention 'new lives' and 'new language and speech' in this extract. This use of language could be read as suggesting a new national consciousness and new ways of experiencing and expressing

it. The particular importance of this idealistic vision becomes apparent in the following extract from the novel which illuminates the narrator's concept of the cultural ideology she envisions for her nation:

> The newly born come into the world bearing gifts. They walk and speak. They have eyes that hold memories of the future, but no one is surprised: they have received their sight back. The newly born come into the world with freed souls that are restless: they seek ways to outwit their rivals. They speak in voices that claim their inheritances. But those to whom they speak have filled their ears with insects. The sky which has betrayed them sends spears of rain into their midst, and they pick them up and cover the plains. (113-114)

It is clear from this passage that Vera sees it as crucial to conceive of the new nation in terms that combine a concern for preserving the cultural past and the future, here suggested by the narrator's use of such expressions as 'memories of the future', nheritances' and 'received their sight back'. By introducing the terms of oppositional relations into her vision of her nation, Vera warns against the cultural lethargy that has made it possible for cultural imperialism to take root in her country. Nehanda's last and succinct statement that

> My people will not rest in bondage. The day has ceased too quickly. (117)

emphasizes again the vision of Zimbabwe as a free nation even more clearly and establishes that despite, or perhaps because of, the national sacrifice endured in the war, the nation's future is full of hope.

It should be clear from these perspectives on Vera's text that it provides two imaginings of the Zimbabwean nation. In contrast with Eppel's construction of colonial Rhodesia as

consisting of a settler centre and a 'native' periphery, 'the space of the people' in Vera is represented as a dry valley with rivers severely affected by the drought. As has been seen, Vera's narrator presents the reader with the picture of the black birds or vultures hovering over the valley and dropping their black feathers on the land or overlooking it from their position in trees. As indicated earlier, the presence of the vultures in the landscape symbolizes the colonial invasion of Zimbabwe. Another image frequently used in this connection is that of darkness which, as suggested earlier, is a metaphor for the dimming cultural consciousness which has resulted from colonialism's cultural imposition. Fanon has remarked in his essay 'On National Culture' that, by denying the existence of a pre-colonial African culture, colonialism's purpose was 'to convince the natives that [it] came to lighten their darkness' (1968:169) Read in this light, Vera's reference to colonial rule in Zimbabwe as a time of darkness is clearly an attempt to reverse the terms, which Eppel's first novel has highlighted, that construct African culture in colonial discourse.

As has also been seen, this representation of the national geography as a site of national resistance to imperial culture and foreign occupation entrenches a nationalist discourse that presents foreign presence as a threat to national identity. It is the kind of representation which Edward Said sees as typical of resistance narratives built around the theme of 'Restore the imprisoned nation to itself' (1993:215), which is clearly the case in Vera's text. This discussion has revealed that the substance of Nehanda's message to her nation is a retrospective call for liberation through armed struggle and a 'journey to our origins', which signifies a return to the cultural consciousness of the nation. Her vision of a liberated 'green valley' is one in which 'new speech' and 'new language' are used to express the recovered national culture. Thus Vera's text illustrates Said's view that in this

type of resistance text national language and national culture are given a central role. He focuses on national culture because it 'organizes and sustains communal memory...; it reinhabits the landscape using restored ways of life, heroes, heroines, and exploits; it formulates expressions of and emotions of pride as well as defiance...' (Said, 1993:215). All these ingredients are present in the novel. Nehanda and, to some degree, Kaguvi, embody defiance of imperial power, and pride in their African culture.

An important aspect of the representation of the nation in *Nehanda* which this discussion has revealed is that of 'spirit-nation' or 'family-nation', in the terms Caroline Rooney (1995:124) uses in her discussion of Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*. This is borne out by the way Vera constructs her protagonist as a gift from the ancestors to their descendants and by Nehanda's own role in the text as a spirit medium on a mission to provide ideological and military guidance to the enslaved nation.

As already discussed, postcolonial Zimbabwe is imagined in the novel as a green valley inhabited by a new breed of people, endowed with a new cultural consciousness. It is clear from the narrative that such a situation can only happen as a result of the collective sacrifice which the war embodies. These two imaginings of national geography - under colonialism and after it - may be seen as subverting the colonial one reflected in the statements by Smith and Browning. As has been seen, their image of Zimbabwe is rooted in the imperial discourse of Africa which portrays the continent as a savage space that must be tamed and civilized.

In analyzing Vera's representation of the nation in *Nehanda,* this chapter has thus far tried to keep in check the importance of the female element in the imaginary construction of the Zimbabwean nation. The significance of this element is in part manifest through the fact that women dominate the landscape in the novel, and in part through their suggested association with the birth of the nation. As noted earlier, the women in the room awaiting Nehanda's birth are described in the text as a versatile group of people who have been chosen to receive Nehanda. By being accessories to the birth of Nehanda, constituted as she is in this novel as a symbol of hope for the nation, the narrative elevates them to the status of mothers of the nation.

Frequently in the literature, the woman symbolizes the country as the expression motherland or *mere patrie* suggests. Doris Sommer in her seminal book *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1991) explains the connection between women and the nation in a way that illuminates the present discussion, although her discussion of this connection is made in the context of an institutionalized creative practice that served to promote patriotism in the newly-independent nations of South America. In the African context, one can think of many works in which the woman embodies the nation. In Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* (1956), a novel set in the Algerian liberation war, Nedjma the heroine represents at the same time 'mother, loved one and the country' (Farida Abu-Haidar, 1996:73). In Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, the prophetess Anoa is presented as the symbol of the 'African' race and unity. In *Nehanda*, Yvonne Vera achieves the gendering of her nation by presenting the woman in such significant roles as dreamer, midwife, mother, peasant, trader, victim, visionary and martyr. As noted earlier, it is through their dreams that the women sitting in the delivery room learned about

Nehanda's coming into the world. The fact that the ancestral spirits communicated with them only is significant in the Shona context of this story. Particularly important is Vatete's role as a midwife who facilitates Nehanda's passage from one section of the nation to another.

The gendering of the nation in *Nehanda* is further suggested through the way in which the colonized woman's body is inscribed as a landscape of colonial experience. The episode in which a village is burnt down and its inhabitants massacred plays a significant role in the construction of women as victims. The boy's witnessing of the murder of his mother, aunt and sisters leaves him with the kind of awareness that only the rape and murder of relatives can cause. As the reader will recall, the episode ends with the boy's determination to stay alive. In this sense, the village thus serves as a microcosm for the Zimbabwean nation which has suffered physically and psychologically from the liberation struggle. Nehanda's own beating by the agents of the colonial administration, and her subsequent death as a consequence also points to the construction of women as victims in a liberation war fought to reclaim land and identity. In this way, Nehanda's and the female villagers' battered bodies become the most powerful symbols of the colonized nation. It is possible that women are presented in these various roles 'to state the centrality of the woman character in the Zimbabwean experience' as R. Zhuwarara (1996:41) has noted with reference to Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*. As has been argued throughout this chapter, Nehanda also comes to represent the spirit of the land which, as Jones (1997:50) correctly states, 'is the source of the people's strength which will ensure their survival against the powerful forces unleashed against them by the colonial invader.' The novel insists through its inscription of Kaguvi as leader of the resistance war and, perhaps more

strongly, through the participation of people from all categories in the war incidents recounted in the novel, that this war is truly a collective and national experience.

The next chapter pursues the investigation into the imaginary constructions of the Zimbabwean nation by considering Dambudzo Marechera's texts written in exile and those written after his exile. Although he is a fellow black Zimbabwean, Marechera's construction of the nation differs from Vera's: his conceptualization of identity as essentially universalist, as opposed to Vera's as traditional, impacts on his construction of the Zimbabwean nation, as is seen in the discussion on his writing of the nation in Chapter Four.